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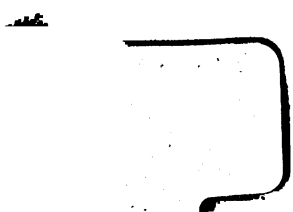
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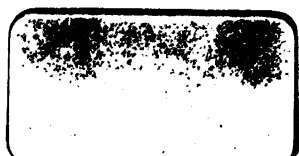


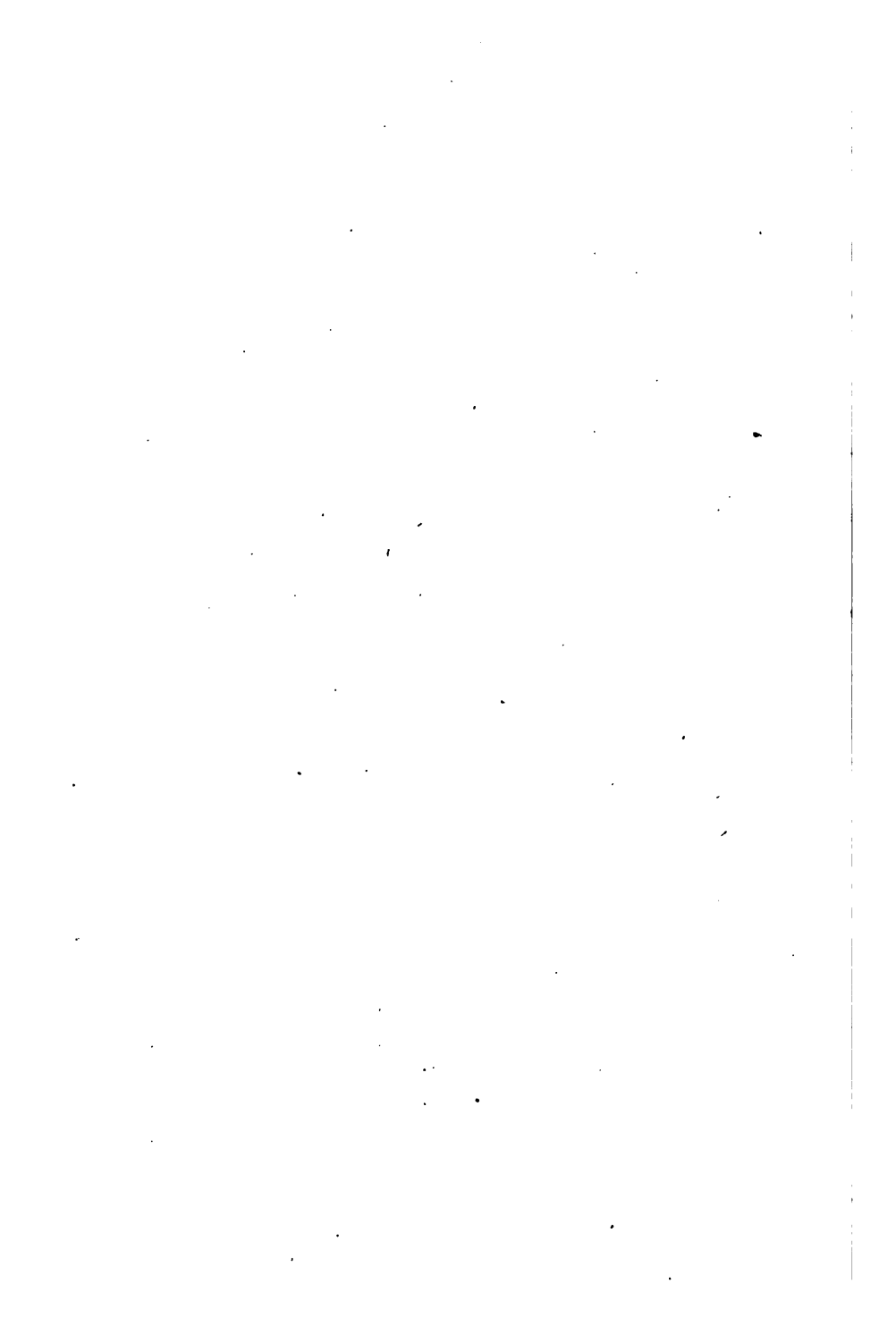
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CHRISTINE BROWNLEE'S ORDEAL

BY

MARY PATRICK

AUTHOR OF 'MARJORIE BRUCE'S LOVERS'

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.



LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1878

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HERMAN

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CHRISTINE BROWNLEE'S ORDEAL.

CHAPTER I.

THE AULD KIRK OF LANGTOUN.

LET me carry you with me in imagination into the plain, big, old-fashioned parish church of Langtoun, an ancient borough in one of the lowland counties of Scotland.

It is a drowsy July morning, almost every pew is filled, and although the doors and windows are open, the air is decidedly close. The bells have not long ceased ringing; a solemn-faced, black-coated elder still keeps guard over the money plate at each door; the first psalm is being sung with no little vigour by the mass of the congregation, a

genteel minority alone refusing to join their voices to the *mêlée* of plebeian adoration.

As yet the long forenoon service is in its first and freshest stage, but notwithstanding this, smelling-bottles and vinaigrettes are already being handed about in the more aristocratic pews ; snuff-boxes, bunches of fragrant cottage-garden flowers and surreptitiously administered peppermints and lozenges of various sorts to suit the vulgar palate of any age, are circulating briskly among the worshippers outside the pale of gentility.

However, in spite of all precautions, many a decent country body, predisposed to succumb by the fatigues of a long journey to church, feels uncomfortably conscious of impending sleepiness, a weakness to be combated heroically until at least the minister is fairly started in his sermon and a worthy neighbour or two in one's immediate vicinity has been seen dozing off into blissful unconsciousness.

The psalm is sung; the precentor has taken his seat again; the elders at the doors have slipped into their pews; the minister is on his feet in the pulpit taking a preliminary glance around his congregation ere he starts the first prayer; a multitudinous rise has followed; and then just as the rustling of feminine finery, the stir of feet and fidgetting with hats and bibles have subsided, something happens which sends an electric thrill through the whole church, making smelling-bottles and the various other paraphernalia of revivifying forces suddenly become unnecessary encumbrances!

A decent old widow in rather snuffy black attire, who ekes out her living by officiating as pew-opener in the parish church, is seen shambling awkwardly along the narrow passage which leads to the most aristocratic spot in the church—the great red-cushioned handsomely-draped pew in the front gallery to the right of the pulpit—and immediately behind her appear a gentleman and lady

whom the old burgh of Langtoun virtually acknowledges as king and queen of the district, this couple being Mr. Grahame of Midforrest and his newly-made wife, Lady Jean.

Their honeymoon is not yet over, and the news of their arrival from the South late the night before has, through skilful tactics on the part of the gentleman, failed to reach the public ear, so that their advent in the Auld Kirk creates a most profound sensation.

There is a decided little pause of awe-struck observation, during which all eyes fortunate enough to be within seeing range simultaneously seek the Midforrest pew, then a subdued whisper of surprise and congratulation, in the midst of which, and while royalty is taking possession of its appointed seat, the minister uplifts his hands and utters rather more hurriedly than is his wont the introductory phrase 'Let us pray,' presently finding familiar ground and launching forth into a prosy and long-winded dissertation upon

the iniquity of human nature in general and that of himself and congregation in particular, touching in the course of his petition upon each salient point of Calvinistic doctrine.

But the crimson-draped pew and its occupants have absorbed the attention of all but a small number of the sober seniors amongst the congregation, and the worthy minister might on this occasion utter much startling heresy without offending the general susceptibilities.

Lady Jean is very young, and very pretty, and very charmingly fresh and innocent-looking in her white muslin and lace costume, with a bunch of red rosebuds in her bosom, and another in her tiny white-gloved hand.

She seems to enjoy being there, too, face to face with her staring new subjects, and is looking about her with a frank, smiling grace, which wins all the young hearts in the church, though it certainly does not indicate a very devout frame of mind.

Then what a fairy-like lace bonnet

trimmed with white lilies sets off the fair, *piquante*, youthful face. Half the female members of the flock are taking mental notes of it already, and itching to try their hands at a reproduction, or at least an imitation in less costly materials, not suspecting, perhaps, that apart from the charms of the dainty, golden-haired head on which it rests, it is but an ordinary bit of fashionable headgear in no case able to cast the glamour which, proceeding from her ladyship's high-bred and fascinating *tout ensemble*, her feminine admirers are inclined to associate with this or that item of her attire.

In her small ears are long, gold-fringed, ruby ear-rings which, matched by gold bracelets studded thickly with the same jewels, gleam gloriously as the light falls upon them. There are diamonds in the curiously wrought black fan which, to the stupefaction of the mass of her fellow-worshippers, whose code of propriety did not admit this article of theatrical associations into their churches, she

presently begins to ply, raining showers of sparkling rays around her.

Altogether Lady Jean Grahame is a lovely divinity, the like of whom has not been seen in any of the aristocratic pews of the old parish church for many and many a year, though a few carping ancients persist in affirming to themselves the prouder glories of country dames belonging to a previous generation.

As for Mr. Grahame, though a tall, well-built, sufficiently distinguished-looking young man, he is of mere secondary interest, on this particular occasion, at least.

He has grown up amongst the Langtoun people. They have been familiar with his somewhat stolid, occasionally gloomy, fair-complexioned, fair-bearded face for years back, as he has made his irregular appearances at Midforrest. They know all about his boyish scrapes and graver faults of later days. They have so far found him rather distant in his manners towards his tenantry, though by

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the district, and a hearty patron of all good old-fashioned field sports.

Langtoun *glories* in him, if it does not greatly like him for any personal qualities he has as yet displayed, and, all things considered, thinks itself to be envied for possessing so high and mighty a personage as its virtual feudal chief.

Not that there are no dissentient rebels in it and its vicinity. Such are certainly to be found amid those who neither rent his farms, nor pocket the profits of his custom at their shops, nor share the enjoyment of a run with his hounds, nor in any way depend upon his good graces. Thin, however, are the ranks of these ungagged malcontents, and but seldom does a whisper of dissatisfaction reach the gentleman's ears—too seldom for his good, I dare say.

So in the Auld Kirk to-day the new lady with the fair, smiling face and pretty graceful movements is the chief object of curiosity and kindly enthusiasm, and when her lord is

stared at, which he certainly is to an extent that bids fair to put him out of temper, it is chiefly from a desire to find out how he is likely to conduct himself in the relationship upon which he has lately entered, and whether there is truth in the commonly reported assertion that his marriage has been altogether a *love* one. One thing at least is very evident. Lady Jean entertains not the slightest fear of him, but, on the contrary, is full of a charming confidence in his devotion and a frankly-shown fondness for himself.

When by-and-by, in the course of an intent survey of the congregation, she chances to discover in one of their own servants' pews behind them a chubby, flaxen-haired, little four-year old laddie who strikes her as uncommonly pretty, and, making a wheel round to get a better look at him, knocks down her parasol and bible, she very coolly gives a tug to her liege lord's coat-sleeve as, sunk in the half-sulky abstraction which is his normal

state when dragged into church-attendance, he sits staring right over the minister's head.

'Dive for my bible and parasol, Harry,' she says, with a coaxing smile and a sly pressure of his hand, and *dive* he does with an unmistakable lighting up of his rather heavy features, though he mutters a grumble at her carelessness.

A little later her bouquet of rosebuds disappears in the same manner, and, as he is watching her this time, she does not feel the necessity of making any direct appeal, only shrugs her shoulders and makes a droll little *moue* of apology and penitence; whereupon he stoops down once more and recovers the lost flowers, giving them back to her with a look which all his assumption of surly gravity cannot cheat her into believing anything but foolishly fond.

'Sit still now, for mercy's sake, Jenny—you're making everybody look at us,' he implores her in a gruff whisper, but her fair

ladyship is in the highest spirits this morning, and rebuke is of no avail.

‘How much longer will the sermon last, Harry?—he began full ten minutes ago,’ she demands, edging a bit closer to her companion, and casting a pathetic look at the minister, who has by this time got over the enumeration of the various heads and subdivisions of heads into which he proposes to divide his subject—a record of an Old Testament battle wrested into startlingly far-fetched spiritual meanings which it would require a long discipline in Presbyterian services to make Lady Jean listen to patiently.

‘Only three quarters of an hour or so, Jenny, my poor girl,’ he tells her in a whisper, and there is a gleam of mischievous enjoyment in his eyes while, his close-cropped fair-haired head supported on his hand as a shield from the church folks’ observation, he looks at his pretty wife.

Lady Jean has never been in a Presbyterian church before, and she listens to her

lord as to an authority on the matter. Her first impulse is to groan aloud, her next to turn the time of her probation to account by making her husband introduce to her in a pleasantly informal manner the various characters of Langtoun society who may chance to be assembled in the Auld Kirk under her eye.

As not a few of the *dramatis personæ* of my story are to be found here present, I must beg my reader to take this opportunity of making his first acquaintance with them, assuring him, however, that but for the lively curiosity and impatience which form the foundation of Lady Jean Grahame's character, I should never dream of dragging them so unceremoniously into the foreground of my work.

The minister—worthy man—has a blessed habit of looking straight ahead and turning neither to the right hand nor the left as he plods through his sermon—a carefully written out production, which has, ere this, done duty

in several churches of the neighbourhood, when he has exchanged pulpits with one of his clerical brethren equally desirous of airing an old discourse at a discreet distance from the ears which have originally listened to it.

The precentor, a new and highly interesting dignitary to the unaccustomed eyes of Episcopalian Lady Jean, is sitting with his sleek head bowed in the voluminous sleeves of his black gown, decorously slumbering; every here and there a member of the flock has succumbed to the influence of the drowsy god and is nodding pathetically, only at intervals waking up to shame and confusion of face when some heartless relative or acquaintance inflicts a specially vigorous nudge; a baby brought to church for its christening and rashly introduced at too early a stage of the service raises a wail which attracts universal attention to the furiously blushing country lass who has been honoured with the charge of carrying it to its baptism; a frowning beadle appears in the aisle in front of the pulpit, and,

sternly gesticulating, hurries off the couple of delinquents; and in the irrepressible widespread titter and whisper which follow this little diverting episode of the forenoon worship, her youthful ladyship sees the signal for action.

‘Dear Harry,’ she whispers, with one of her irresistible glances—full well does she know how her blue eyes hold him in willing bondage—‘I am going crazy. If you won’t speak to me I’ll do something desperate. You needn’t smile, sir. I’ve very nearly made up my mind to faint and so force you to carry me out into the open air. You wouldn’t like that, I’m sure,’ and she smells at her rosebuds and plies her black fan, drawing several ominously long breaths.

The church is certainly awfully hot; the smell of peppermints is somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood of even that aristocratic spot—the Midforrest pew; the minister’s monotonous deep voice, droning on interminably as he plods steadily through his still bulky heap of closely-written manuscript;

trimmed with white lilies sets off the fair, *piquante*, youthful face. Half the female members of the flock are taking mental notes of it already, and itching to try their hands at a reproduction, or at least an imitation in less costly materials, not suspecting, perhaps, that apart from the charms of the dainty, golden-haired head on which it rests, it is but an ordinary bit of fashionable headgear in no case able to cast the glamour which, proceeding from her ladyship's high-bred and fascinating *tout ensemble*, her feminine admirers are inclined to associate with this or that item of her attire.

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honoured example of that generally respected species—the self-made man.

Beside him near the foot of the long pew is his only daughter Christine, of whom I shall say no more in the hurry of a first introduction than that she is the acknowledged beauty of Langtoun, and strikes even Lady Jean as being a remarkably elegant and interesting damsel.

Above her is her only brother Hugh, whom Lady Jean knows to be a particular friend of her husband's. He is a bronzed, rather melancholy-looking man of thirty or thereabouts, with an erect military carriage, and his left arm hanging loosely in a sling.

‘A late Ashantee hero, at home just now on six months’ leave of absence,’ whispers Mr. Grahame, with a smile; and as the subject of this explanation chances to catch his eye just at that moment the two men exchange a friendly glance.

‘I shall like that man,’ pronounces her young ladyship *sotto voce*, her hand over her rosy lips

owner of an extensive moorland property where of late valuable minerals have been discovered, and, what more especially interests Lady Jean, he is besides the factor of the estates belonging to Mr. Grahame.

She has repeatedly heard her husband speak of this family, so she looks at them with particular attention.

Mr. Brownlee is an elderly man with a shining bald crown and rather hard-lined yet handsome face. His coat is of irreproachable cut, his steel-gray gloves fit him to a nicety, he wears a white camellia in his buttonhole, carries his well-shapen prominent nose high in the air, and looks about him with quick observant glances which miss little of what is to be learned in the circle of his surroundings.

Gifted with uncommon talent for business, unresting ambition, inflexible determination to overcome, he has pushed his way in life so successfully, that, born in obscurity and reared in hardships, he now finds himself one of the magnates of his district and a highly-

honoured example of that generally respected species—the self-made man.

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to muffle her tones, and her blue eyes dart a mischievous gleam into her husband's face again wearing its stolid look ; then she glances anew at that broken arm, in which almost every man, woman, and child of Langtoun feel a private and particular glory, knowing that it has been splintered by Ashantee bullets, and that it is owned by a native of their old burgh.

Close by her son sits Mrs. Brownlee, a faded, rather peevish-looking though very lady-like woman, who has been a beauty in her day. One of the triumphs of Mr. Brownlee's life had been the securing of her hand. Not that he had ever entertained any very warm love for her, but because she had brought him the honour of connection with a family of undisputed county rank—the Urquharts of West-erwood and Boghall, two adjoining properties in the next parish destined to figure in my coming relation of his daughter Christine's joys and sorrows. Rumour said that a previous disappointment in love had resulted in making Miss Urquhart inclined to marry

for money, else she would not have condescended to become the wife of a self-raised man and country banker.

The buxom matron in many-hued attire with her florid complexion and semi-ministerial air, whom Lady Jean with a shrug of her pretty shoulders pronounces 'a most dreadful Guy,' is the worthy minister's energetic and voluble helpmeet. The bevy of rather plain-looking boys and girls of all ages from eight to eighteen clustered round her in the big square pew near the centre of the church is composed of their eight olive-branches.

The very pale, thin, middle-aged lady in handsome widow's weeds is Mrs. Kirkwood, of Southfield, a pretty villa-place in the immediate neighbourhood of Langtoun.

'You've heard of the brewing Kirkwoods —her husband was one of them,' Mr. Graham whispers, and her ladyship feels surprised that this elegant woman, whose finely-cut melancholy face has struck her fancy, should have any connection whatever with vulgar trade. Quite as distinguished-looking,

too, in her own youthful way, is the pretty, slight, brunette girl of seventeen or eighteen who sits by her side, and whose great lustrous dark eyes Lady Jean has several times during the course of the sermon surprised watching her with interest.

'A very un-English type,' is the inward comment of the mistress of Midforrest, and she regards the two ladies with increased attention when she presently finds out that the younger one is an orphan niece of the elder, and is French on her mother's side, though now settled down at Southfield as Mrs. Kirkwood's adopted daughter, and heiress of her great wealth.

'Not a motherly woman,' thinks Lady Jean, studying the expression of the brewer's widow; and indeed there is in her face a certain statuesque coldness which repels one even while it arouses interest in her character.

The careworn, sharp-visaged, little elderly lady, surrounded by a group of young folks

which rivals the ministerial one in size and quite eclipses it in fashionable get-up, is the wife of Dr. Dawson, one of the three medical men whom Langtoun boasts.

The heavy-built portly old gentleman in white waistcoat and ponderous watch-chain, whose snoring had at an early stage of the sermon tickled Lady Jean's risibility, is the Grahames' nearest neighbour of position, Mr. Fleming of Langlands. The red-haired, plain, but jolly-looking ladies of various ages who help him to fill the roomy well-cushioned pew in the centre of the front gallery are his wife and daughters, and the two equally carrotty youths in the awkward hobbledehoy stage are his sons, home from an English public school for their Midsummer holidays.

'Rather unpromising neighbours, but anyhow, I shan't need to be jealous of you in that quarter, Mr. Grahame,' is her young ladyship's scribbled comment on this county family, after her husband has slipped into her hand the scrap from his memorandum-book

recording their name and status ; and the notion of lovely Jenny being jealous of him in any quarter whatever, strikes him as so perfectly preposterous, that the corners of his somewhat sulkily-set mouth give way in spite of himself, and he smiles outright—smiles outright at a particularly inappropriate moment, too, for the minister has just then got to the last paragraph of his discourse, and is taking his customary sweeping glance over his flock, as if to show them that though the exigencies of sermon-reading prevent his keeping a fatherly eye upon their doings, they are nevertheless individually addressed, and bound to make individual application of the sound old doctrines he has been expounding for their edification during the last hour.

The minister catches the young man's smile, and inly records his name in his black book ; catches, too, a sweet angelic glance from the innocent blue eyes of the new lady of the manor, remarks that she is attentively

taking notes of his discourse, and on the moment yields to her his loyal allegiance, semi-Papist as she is !

So chance determines our impressions of each other, and the most self-possessed and *nonchalant* of offenders, though the ringleader of the rest, need never be surprised to find himself acquitted by the jury without leaving the box.

And now, the sermon at last come to an end, Lady Jean demurely pockets her pencil and notes, pulls on her gloves, which to the dire confusion of the Langtoun code of church etiquette she had taken off soon after her entry, and looks around her with an innocent air of wonder as to what is going to be done next.

A solemn pause has set in, following a general rustle and stir of expectation.

The minister is descending the pulpit stairs, grasping with one hand the voluminous black gown which gives no little dignity to his tall and burly figure ; half a dozen awk-

ward, agitated men of the working class, in shining Sunday attire, range themselves around the font beneath the pulpit, and presently respond with jerky bows varying in degrees of sulky resignation to the queries of their pastor, whose duty it is to draw forth their assent to the orthodox kirk doctrines.

Then having been sternly admonished in the presence of the congregation, they march one after another to a bench in the vicinity of the precentor's desk, where the women charged with the honourable if agitating duty of carrying the infants to their baptism sit in state, their own many-coloured Sunday finery well hidden by the snowy and in some cases elaborately trimmed robes of the unconscious causes of the day's excitement, who with one wailing exception lie on these broad laps peacefully blinking at the light, and contorting their tiny red faces in the droll fashion of their species.

The women put the infants carefully into the awkward paternal arms, the men thus

laden find in much shamefacedness their way back to the minister, who as speedily as possible—for be it understood at once he is a sensible and a feeling-hearted man, without a particle of the bigot in his composition—puts fathers and children out of their purgatory.

The name of the new member of the church is proclaimed with all possible distinctness, the prescribed formula is uttered, and the water sprinkled on the baby face, in every case eliciting a pathetic wail of remonstrance, then the embarrassed and hotly blushing owner departs to deposit his burden on its natural *habitat*—a woman's lap—finally returning to receive a short exhortation, which over, he is free to disappear into private life until the appearance of a new olive branch.

Lady Jean leans over the gallery pew in high delight whilst the christenings are going on, her lord regarding the proceedings with a grimly quizzical face, and occasionally

whispering explanations for her benefit. She has by this time quite forgotten her interest in the best class Langtoun church folks, and she puts not another question regarding them, so I shall spare my reader the boredom of further introductions in this chapter, already, I fear, over-full of chronicle to please him.

Two of the babies have been christened Jean, in her honour, as Mr. Grahame informs her, with a muttered comment that 'it is like these people's impudence.' She is vastly pleased with the attention, and stretches her graceful long neck till it aches, so intent is she on making out the features of these particular little bundles of humanity—*her babies*, as she calls them, with one of her arch, merry looks into the supercilious face turned towards her, and already in one moment softening into good humour.

'*My babies* must each get a present. I'll see to that to-morrow. Now, Harry, be sure to remind me if I forget,' is the whisper that

reaches him as the last prayer has ended, and then to his consternation there is a sudden fidgetting movement on her vivacious ladyship's part, and a swift turning of all eyes to their pew, over whose book-board her fan has fallen, its diamonds producing a succession of wonderful sparkling effects as it whirls through the air, descending with an emphatic thud on the board of a pew beneath, and very nearly making its startled occupants scream out, even in the middle of the parting benediction.

Most assuredly the churching of Lady Jean Grahame is no ordinary churching, but an event to be remembered for years and years, and in the bottom of their hearts deeply grateful do the mass of the congregation feel to her for the pleasant wafts of excitement she has introduced into the usually soporific kirk atmosphere.

At last her youthful ladyship feels a pang of contrition, and a faint fear that her husband will be angry with her.

She looks up into his face beseechingly, her roses paling ever so little, and her blue eyes sweetly apologising, and what does her bewitched lord do—albeit he is by no means of a naturally amiable disposition—shakes his head, laughs, and, giving her shoulder a reassuring pat in the very face of the staring kirk folk, whispers a promise to return with the fan in the course of a minute or two, then leaves the pew in search of the missing treasure, a marriage gift of his own to his careless ladylove.

By this time the service is over, and the big church is pouring forth its crowds of worshippers. The beadle has taken temporary possession of the cause of Lady Jean's confusion, and presently he meets Mr. Grahame, and gives it up with his best bow.

Then, feeling half ashamed and half happy that his fair Jenny has got such a hold of his heart as make fetching and carrying in her service positively pleasant work, he returns up the crowded staircase, pushing his

way not over-courteously. A minute or two later he reappears, his wife on his arm, and carefully pilots her to their handsome carriage waiting at the church gate opening on the High Street.

Here they find a crowd assembled to watch their departure and secure a good look at the interesting fair bride. None of the Langtoun gentility have joined it, feeling doubtful whether Mr. Grahame, who has chosen to make a secret of his home-coming, might not think them ill-bred should they waylay him on this occasion; but the lower orders have been troubled by no such scruples.

If it was not Sunday there would be a burst of hearty cheering in honour of the lately married pair. As it is, there reigns a solemn silence which vastly surprises and greatly awes lively Lady Jean, who, though of Scottish parentage, has been chiefly reared abroad, and so is unused to Scottish ways.

She heaves a sigh of relief when, having

driven off, her husband remarks with a laugh 'that they have got over their churching at last.'

'And you were really good to me in spite of my troublesomeness, you dear old bear,' she says, smiling up into his face and holding up her rosy lips for a kiss.

The young man clasps her soft little hand in a great grip of passionate fondness and kisses her fervently again and again, saying nothing but a word or two of foolish petting. His nature is a very reserved one, and speech does not come easily when his heart is full.

And his heart is always strangely full when his fair young wife turns to him with one of her frequent caresses. Love for her is the first mighty passion he has ever known, though alas! he has killed much burdensome time in coarse dissipation.

She has not half fathomed the depths of his character yet, and she does not suspect the need for studying them. A laughing

question speedily rouses him from the happy abstraction into which he has sunk.

‘Will you really go on being good to me in a loverlike way for years and years, Harry?’

‘For years and years, Jenny;’ and the small hand is gripped hard once more.

‘Always?’ asks Lady Jean succinctly, with a droll arching of her eyebrows and a smiling glance up into his thoughtful face.

‘Always—so long as I am sure of you being every bit my own, caring for nobody in the world but me, little Jenny.’

It is a characteristic speech, and would make an older and farther-seeing woman perceive the danger there is that jealousy may yet come to the surface of the turbulent torrent of feeling his passionate love for her creates; but innocent, merry-natured Lady Jean laughs out undauntedly, quite amused by his stipulation, made with a clouded brow.

‘Oh! but I won’t promise that, you tyrant. It is my nature to care for scores

of people at a time and to try to make them care for me. Poor papa used to say I was what the Scotch folk call "everybody's body."

'Your nature, is it? Well, Jenny, you had better change your nature. I should be miserable if a day came that I was not sure of having you all to myself;' and he looks into her fair merry face, hungry for reassurance.

Once more she laughs as gaily as a child.

'So I must care for nobody but your lordship, indeed! Well, I must say you are a greedy selfish fellow!'

'Oh, you may care for a hundred people in a small way, of course—that is nothing to me, you know that very well. But, Jenny, don't let anybody ever come between you and me. I warn you that I could not stand it a week;' and another passionate kiss is pressed on the pretty lips.

But all the inner turmoil of his spirit is quite unguessed by the girl.

‘As if anybody could possibly come between you and your wife, you ridiculous, sulky Harry,’ she says, with a childlike air of such unfeigned astonishment at the preposterousness of the notion, that he feels suddenly relieved and ashamed of having even for a moment wronged her pure heart by a morbid fear lest it should change in the course of the coming years.

Then Lady Jean, seeing the ugly clouds clear away from his forehead, falls to petting him with all imaginable goodwill, little knowing what a power for good her love is, how his self-seeking, narrow, distrustful nature is as yet only open to ennobling influences through the channel of her relationship to him.

In her eyes he is but her big, strong, foolishly fond bear of a husband; no paragon of perfection, certainly, yet a very sufficiently good fellow, whose stiff reserved Scotch ways make outsiders quite unnecessarily afraid of him.

She knows him too well, to be taken in so, and means to prove herself a wonderfully clever bear-leader.

She tells him all this with her pleasant flattering assurance born of supreme confidence in his love for her, and, vastly pleased in his heart of hearts, he laughs and takes her in his arms, never for his part suspecting that he needs any radical reformation, or that unthinking Jenny may be the agent destined for the work.

Yet that carriage *tête-à-tête*, lifted quite out of the realm of the commonplace by the intensity of his passion for the gay pretty chatterer, does him more good than all the worthy minister's long prayers and longer sermon could have done, even supposing that she had let him listen to them in peace, and that he had been in the very unlikely frame of mind to heed their teachings. So the young couple's church-going served, after all, a higher end than they had intended it to do, nor did they miss the soul-soothing benediction of the

mighty throbbing Father-Heart, whose refining influences are, I doubt not, at work under many strange and unsuspected disguises all over the mysterious teeming universe.

And so, in love with each other and the world, and blissfully sceptical of the possibility of their ever being anything else, the carriage bears them along the lengthy unpicturesque old High Street of Langtoun, its closed shop-fronts and group of black-coated Sunday loungers making the town wear its grimmest face; traverses at great speed the half-a-mile's stretch of level, dusty highroad which lies between the eastern extremity of the High Street and the great entrance gates of Midforrest, skirting the park wall the chief part of the way; and finally disappears with a wheeling rush up the long shady avenue of ancient elms leading to the mansion-house.

CHAPTER II.

THE MANSE FOLK AT DINNER.

'DEAR! dear! dear!' sighed Mrs. Drew, as she helped her husband, the minister, to a second chop, and cast a thoughtful comprehensive glance around the dinner table, pondering whether or not the already often-assailed cold roast opposite her good man was likely to hold out against the hard-to-be-appeased appetites of her young folk there assembled; 'it's a pity to see a young couple in their position seemingly without a proper sense of their responsibilities to God and man.'

'But,' protested Aggie Drew, a sonsie, sensible damsel of eighteen, with a big bump of assertiveness and an unconquerable love of fair play, 'we know nothing about *her* yet, whatever we may think of Mr. Grahame—I

dare say she found the service long, since she is not used to the Scotch Kirk, and that made her fidgetty.'

'Humph,' grunted her mother impatiently ; 'I can't endure such tomfoolery ; fans and bouquets and ball-room vanities that are all very well in their proper place, mind you—for I've no patience with upsetting bigotry—are a crying disgrace in the Auld Kirk of Langtoun ;' and the good lady vented her indignation by bestowing a sounding slap on the fingers of her youngest born, a pinafored urchin whom she had discovered in the act of surreptitiously helping himself to green pease—a dainty intended solely for his elders of mature years.

Slaps circulated freely in the manse, and no outcry followed this summary chastisement, so the conversation went on undisturbed.

'Tuts, tuts,' said the minister mildly, holding out his plate for another potato and bestowing a would-be stern shake of the head on

his delinquent son ; ' she is a fashionable, fine lady and a bred Episcopalian besides. Her lights are not our lights, and we'll do well to suspend our judgment in the meantime until we see what sort of wife she makes Mr. Grahame, and how far she exercises her influence over him for the good of the parish.'

' The manse is badly in want of repairs, not to speak of an addition, and seeing that Mr. Grahame is the chief heritor, I think it would be well worth while giving her a hint on that subject, Mr. Drew,' remarked the good lady, with a sage side-glance of reviving good-humour.

All the young people were on the alert now. Repairs, additions ! what prospects of exciting novelty had not their mother's words conjured up ! But the minister, into whose ears this direly suggestive word *addition* had of late been breathed alarmingly often, drew his brows and sighed pathetically.

' The Manse may well last my time, Ann,'

he said. 'I wonder you women can't settle down comfortably, but must ever be planning improvements. There's not a drier house in the parish, nor a less draughty, and as for new paint and bow windows and the like, we've no need of such vanities.'

'Leave papa his garden, his pipe, and his dark little study, and he'll ask nothing more,' laughed Aggie; but her mother stuck to her point.

'Vanities indeed!' she echoed indignantly, 'things that everybody has now-a-days, the very tradesmen in your own parish. I wonder to hear you, Mr. Drew! People must be like their neighbours; and I don't consider it any harm whatever to provide yourself, so far as is in your power, even with articles of positive luxury, if they are in general use in your own station of life.'

Here Mrs. Drew paused, out of breath with her eloquence, and her eldest son, a first-year divinity student, put in his oar, with a mischievous glance across the table at his

father, who was looking discomfited but not convinced.

‘Mother,’ he said, passing his hand through his curly fair hair, as if thinking deeply, ‘it strikes me that every one of us would define vanities in a different manner if we liked to be candid. Lady Jean Grahame’s fan, for example, may be in her eyes as necessary an adjunct to her church equipment as your Sunday parasol or my chimney-pot hat.’

A laugh in which the minister sounded the first note rewarded this sally, and Tom Drew did not sink a whit in his mother’s estimation, though she assumed a stern air and bade him ‘remember the Fifth Commandment and keep his wit for the student’s debating club or some such more appropriate opportunity of showing off his impudence.’

A diversion of the dangerous subject had been accomplished, however, and good Mr. Drew blessed his first-born son in his heart. Yet if he could have read his worthy help-

meet's thoughts he would have perceived that the case was serious—her mind was made up for action, and whenever occasion offered she would beseech the aid of the new lady of the manor. After all, charity was a bounden duty, and it became her to hope that Lady Jean, if unhappily careless about her own spiritual interests, might yet be capable of rousing into sympathy with other people's *material* ones. 'God helps those who help themselves,' and 'Make your hay while the sun shines,' were two wise old saws, and after she had made her formal call at Midforrest in company with the minister, she would make an informal one with Aggie and little Lizzie in their new Sunday muslins and best bonnets, and tell the plain story of her privations and her aspirations, unrestrained by the presence of her goodman, who was by far too old-fashioned in his notions of the style of housekeeping incumbent on a couple in their position, with daughters to marry and social duties to fulfil.

Whilst Mrs. Drew thus meditated, sipping her glass of sherry and waiting till the last of the juvenile knives and forks should have ceased to play, Aggie and Tom were engaged in a discussion to which the minister, his last chop disposed of, was listening with much interest.

‘Anyway she took notes of the sermon, Tom. I saw her.’

Tom laughed the laugh of the scorner.

‘Of the sermon, you stupid?—of anything but the sermon. Didn’t I see her looking us all up as coolly as you like, and scribbling down funny remarks about us, which she slipped into her sulky-looking owner’s hand? (I can’t bear that man, he seems so wrapped up in his own mightiness)’—the lad added parenthetically, calling forth a rebuke from his father, who felt bound to interfere, since the wonted guardian of the family decorum seemed absorbed in Sunday meditations. Yet just at that moment the worthy minister had sustained a disagreeable shock which disin-

clined him for the exertion of paternal jurisdiction. That sharp-eyed rascal Tom was rarely mistaken, and in all probability the innocent, blue eyes which had looked him in the face with a sweetly serious air as the small hand traced swift pencilled lines had been the eyes of an arch impostor ! And to think that he, who, if not gifted with a talent for pulpit oratory, was at least a sufficiently shrewd, practical man, should have been taken in thus.

‘You’re only guessing, Tom. I don’t believe she was doing anything of the sort,’ Aggie said indignantly. But here two of the younger members of the family, who had been saying nothing, but swallowing the whole conversation with avidity, struck in.

‘She did, though, Aggie. First she looked at the Brownlees and wrote something, and then at us and wrote again——’

Here number two interrupted, eager to contribute her quota of information.

‘And at Mrs. Kirkwood, and Antoinette,

and at the Dawsons, and—everybody,' ended little Liz, with an emphatic nod, and behold, the youngsters' cup of iniquity was full.

'Silence!' ordered their father, in his loudest and sternest voice, 'let me hear no more of this idle gossiping, and learn to hold your tongues unless you are spoken to when your elders are present.'

'Dear, dear! I can't think what delight you bairns can find in vain tittle-tattle, and on the Sabbath day, too,' chimed in their mother, uplifting her hands, and heaving a sigh which was partly of satisfaction at having matured her little plot, and partly of grief at her children's deplorable depravity; so, thanks to their parents' united efforts, the juvenile element was for the time being made to succumb, and a *doucer* style of conversation introduced.

'The charity-school children are getting worse than ever, Mr. Drew,' remarked the matron, with a melancholy shake of her head, adorned with an imposing lace cap and flow-

ing blue ribbons ; ‘ the schoolmaster ought to be spoken to, silly upsetting young man. It’s plainly to be seen that he thinks himself above his business, and the bairns are getting out their horns finely. I saw one monkey sitting fingering a *peerie* he had taken out of his pocket the very time you were giving out your text, and a lassie was in the very act of making a rabbit out of her Sunday pocket handkerchief—set her up with the like provided out of charitable folks’ purses—when I fixed my eye upon her. If I were you I’d give that young popinjay a bit of advice—his head’s fairly turned with ambition to rise in the world and get in among the gentility of the town, instead of seeking to be a shining light in the station of life in which Providence has placed him.’

‘ Humph ! ’ said the minister, looking at his watch to see if the time for the afternoon service was drawing near, ‘ he’s young ; he’ll learn sense after he’s been knocked about by the ups and downs of life ; better let him

manage his own business. "Ower mony cooks spoil the broth," Ann.'

'Manage, indeed! *mismanage* you mean, Mr. Drew,' spoke the good lady, with vehemence, 'but I'll take an early opportunity of giving him a bit of my mind myself—in a friendly way, in a friendly way, and for his own good, of course,' she added, in some haste, noticing a look of alarm on her husband's face, and a malicious twinkle in the eyes of that terrible boy Tom, who had just bestowed a sly nudge on his nearest neighbour, Aggie.

'Now be off and get ready for church, children. There's never a Sunday afternoon but some of you put us in a fluster at the end with your dilatory ways. Your father and I'll not be a minute preparing.' Thus she presently ordered, and the youngest members of the family cleared off with a good deal of noisy commotion; Aggie and Tom, who as the elder branches were privileged, lingering behind in the expectation of hearing some

special news too spicy to be uttered before the children.

‘Think what Jenny was telling me when I went into the kitchen a minute, Mr. Drew,’ the lady went on, after making a vain attempt to dislodge the young couple, ‘Dr. Erskine’s old housekeeper is on the look-out for another master. She’s taken it into her head that the doctor is going to be married, and guess who to?’ and she regarded her trio with a smile of superior information, in which there was yet a shadow as of pity for the approaching sacrifice of one of the very few marriageable young men of genteel Langtoun.

‘To our Aggie, maybe,’ spoke the minister jocularly—he liked a bit of quiet jesting when snug in the bosom of his family, or in the midst of trusted friends, lay or clerical; and Aggie blushed and frowned, greatly to Tom’s enjoyment.

‘To Christine Brownlee!’ cried that irrepressible youth, with a chuckle. ‘The doctor’s

been sweet on her for the last twelvemonth and more. I watched him and her at the Dawson's picnic in June, you remember. Didn't I tell you that very day that you needn't set your cap at him, Aggie ?'

'Be quiet, Tom,' protested his sister.

'There's nothing I hate like that style of vulgar joking you've taken to lately, Tom,' pronounced his mother, with dignity ; yet the minister and she exchanged a glance of mutual pride in the discernment of their first-born son.

'It's very likely a guess of old Kirsty's—she's growing *donnered*, poor body, and I doubt she'll find it hard to get into another place if the doctor ever parts with her,' remarked Mr. Drew, sceptically. His wife's kitchen stories often turned out to be sadly wanting in solid foundations.

'If Christine Brownlee can't marry higher than that, she'll die an old maid, that's what I think, and I've known her better than any of you,' was Aggie's emphatic verdict, listened

to with some respect by her parents, but utterly scouted by Tom.

‘Hoity-toity, Mistress Aggie,’ mocked the lad, ‘you think there’s nobody like Christine, but let me tell you Doctor Erskine’s worth twenty of her, or any Langtoun girl among you, and she’ll be a great fool if she does not jump at him, supposing he gives her the chance.’

‘Dear, dear!’ sighed Mrs. Drew, raising a pathetic hand, ‘where did that boy pick up such vulgar expressions? I wonder you would talk to him at all, Aggie.’

‘He’s a very clever fellow, they tell me, and has a few thousand pounds, besides what he makes by his practice, and, as far as I know, is as steady as a rock, if he *will* hold off from the kirk. It seems to me that the Brownlees could say nothing against the match,’ said the minister, taking another look at his big old-fashioned watch.

‘I should think not, for my part,’ chimed in his wife warmly. ‘It’s all very well for

girls to carry their noses in the air sniffing at honest men in their own stations for a year or two, and looking out for fabulous fairy princes to come and carry them off ; but let them bide a little, and they'll be glad to lower their price : mark my words, Aggie.'

There was a young and bashful Auld Kirk minister of a neighbouring moorland parish who had of late shown unnatural and desperate bravery in proffering amorous attentions to *sonsie* Miss Drew, greatly to her disgust and Tom's delight ; so this was a shaft sped chiefly for her benefit, and Aggie coloured and frowned portentously.

'All the same,' she said, defiance in her air, 'Christine is not an ordinary girl like the rest of us, and I'm sure she'll never settle down here, a plain doctor's wife.'

'Humph !' grumbled her mother, while the minister looked rather ruefully at offended Aggie, his favourite of the stirring youngsters, and Tom whispered some teasing nonsense into her ear : 'I tell you Kirsty says

the doctor goes to their house two or three times in the week—catch him coming here once a month even—besides, there's nobody else paying her attention, nobody able to aspire to such a fine lady, anyhow.' (Mrs. Drew and Christine entertained a hearty dislike for each other, founded on the unsailable rock of natural aversion, Christine used to say ; so let my reader beware of forming a hasty unfavourable judgment of the subject of discussion.)

Tom and Aggie were both ready with a refutation of this argument.

'Oh, there's Mr. Urquhart of Boghall, her own cousin—everybody knows that he's in love with her.'

'And a fine estate and position,' added Aggie, triumphantly.

'Oh, stuff and nonsense, stuff and nonsense, children. There's no use mentioning *him*. The poor fellow's dying of consumption, and has more need to be thinking of his spiritual state than of the matrimonial one,'

said the matron, ending with a heavy sigh and a solemn head-shake as she uplifted a pious glance towards the ceiling.

Tom grinned, and even sober Aggie and her father felt a twitch at the corners of their mouths as Mrs. Drew made this startlingly sudden descent from the mountains of vanity, where for a time she had been thoughtlessly disporting herself; but the first peal of the kirk bell just then sounding out, there was an opportunity to beat a retreat from the dinner-table, and so hide the unbecoming levity the worthy lady's speech had awakened. Five minutes later the family might have been seen filing forth from the garden gate of the old-fashioned manse, and soberly taking their way to the sanctuary with which we have already made acquaintance.

CHAPTER III.

'QUEEN CHRISTINE' AT HOME.

THERE was not in the county of Blankshire a pleasanter room than the drawing-room of Woodend, Mr. Brownlee's substantial villa residence, built for him soon after his settling at Langtoun, now over two-and-thirty years ago. Christine had received *carte blanche* to re-furnish it when she came home from her German school for good and all, an accomplished young lady of eighteen; and whatever Christine did was well done. It wore its coolest, most inviting summer aspect on this hot July day of which I have been speaking, and Dr. Erskine, who had walked out from Langtoun in the full broil of the afternoon sun after the church bells had rung in, paused on the threshold, the better to view

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the general effect. There was Indian matting on the floor, relieved here and there by bright-coloured strips of costly Persian carpeting. Indian and Chinese vases stood about brimming over with lovely blossoming plants. The long low windows opening on the lawn admitted through their partly closed *persiennes* and softly falling lace draperies an agreeable half light in which one could rest luxuriously. The panelled walls painted a cool grey, relieved by borders of gilding, were hung with exquisite water-colour paintings, the prevailing tints of the furniture were grey and delicate pink, contrasting well with the frames of black walnut. An open piano littered with music, a harp, portfolios of drawings and photographs, exquisite little groups of statuary, choice editions in rich bindings of morocco and gold, pretty nick-nacks of every description picturesquely strewn about the room—all spoke of cultivated tastes, and suggested the habitual presence of grace-loving womanhood. Our

doctor, whose solitary bachelor abode was a dingy old house in the High Street, known as *the doctor's* for the last hundred years or so, felt as if he had stepped out of the ordinary work-a-day world into a wonderful fairy land, where any number of enchanting sights and sounds might await him.

There was certainly a poetical substratum of more than average depth in Dr. Gordon Erskine, somewhat gruff and abrupt in manners, and very combative and ambitious of practical success as he was. He had rested very little during his nine-and-twenty years of life ; he had not been able to rest while problem after problem was being defiantly thrust under his eyes by that sworn foe of idle enjoyment, the spirit of scientific enquiry ; the longer he had lived the more need had he experienced of persistent wrestling with the mysteries of Nature and mental harvesting of the fruits of other men's painful research. Yet, toiling on with an energy which was half pain and half delight, he had

often cast longing glances towards the fair green oases of life, where artistic beauty under many forms, sweet human joys of love and social intercourse with congenial friends, philosophic contemplation of the grand spiritual forces he had scarce had leisure to perceive in the hurry of his pursuit of the *material*, might fill for him a brimming cup of tranquil happiness, and quiet his thirst for the unattainable, so stern a moving power now.

Since I have inflicted on my reader such a lengthy paragraph *à propos* of my young doctor's inner life, I had better make an end of the subject by telling him the few leading facts of his outward one.

The child of a fairly distinguished Scottish M.D., he had lost both parents in his infancy, and been thrown on the guardianship of distant relatives, who had secured to him first-class educational advantages, by which his natural abilities had been made the most of. He had thrown himself with ardour into the special studies required for the medical

profession, finally departing from Britain with flourishing college laurels to gain further knowledge in the Paris lecture-rooms and hospitals, returning after a couple of busy years to Edinburgh, where he was appointed assistant to a noted surgeon. The sudden death of this gentleman having temporarily cast him adrift from professional employment, he had chanced to come to Langtoun on a visit to an old family friend, a Dr. Grierson, whom he found on the point of retiring into private life after forty years' practice in that district. To make a long story short, the young doctor, desiring rest and country air for the sake of his health, shaken by overwork, made arrangements for his temporary establishment in the house and practice vacated by this worthy gentleman, who at the moment my story opens was comfortably installed along with an old maiden sister in a snug cottage villa close by the town. His health being completely re-established, he was now looking out for some wider sphere

of professional work than Langtoun could supply.

And now let me go on with my Sunday chronicle. The forenoon service duly attended, as became a family of consequence and responsibilities towards the imitative vulgar of Langtoun, the Brownlees spent the rest of the day in such occupations and amusements as, without being obtrusively irreligious, were yet quite sufficiently unsab-batical to horrify the puritanical party of the townspeople amongst whom their lot was cast.

Let it not be supposed that Langtoun was wanting in a constellation of burning and shining lights in contrast with whom life-enjoying persons of easy and hopeful religious views had an alarming tendency to stand forth as very angels of darkness. Good old-fashioned Calvinists whose practice did not belie their creed were certainly to be found there as in every country town of Scotland, but, alas for the credit of the Auld Kirk where Mr. Drew, not to mention his energetic help-

meet, had laboured for half a lifetime, I must own that the Dissenters had secured the great majority of them. There was a young and fiery orator in the Free Kirk pulpit, the sitters under whom were nourished with a spiritual diet of the raciest description; a stern and venerable upholder of the ancient hard and fast lines of demarcation between the saints and the sinners in the U.P., and both of these had a large following of fervent disciples, and were as thorns in the flesh of the shepherd of the parish, by law established, the Reverend John Drew, notwithstanding that he had not yet been called upon to endure the humiliation of witnessing any perceptible thinning of the Auld Kirk ranks, where with one or two exceptions the gentility of the town and neighbourhood was to be found, thus of course securing the support of the better class tradespeople and the farmers—a very numerous body, bound to hold Conservative views out of interested motives.

The banker's family, as I was saying, were among the easy-going respectable folks of comfortably elastic conscience, and Sunday afternoon church-going was not in their code of bounden duties. Mr. Brownlee, the weather permitting, used to mount his cob and ride over to his place of Stoneywood, or elsewhere, as the fancy took him or business cares made his presence desirable ; a man of many cares was this self-raised magnate of Langtoun. Mrs. Brownlee would retire to her own room with a mild novel and a smelling bottle, and eventually drop off into dozing oblivion of her small worries and ailments. Captain Brownlee and his sister, who were almost inseparable ' chums ' during the young man's rare sojourns at home, were in the habit of sitting down together indoors or outdoors in the most luxurious circumstances attainable, and enjoying a desultory chat, in which two or three friends (intimate enough to visit at the house on Sunday) occasionally joined them.

As, having entered the drawing-room without being announced, Dr. Erskine, one of these privileged visitors, lingered amusedly on the threshold, watching the brother and sister installed in opposite *fau-teuils* near a window at the upper end of the long apartment, Christine turned her glance to the door, and rose with a pleased little cry of surprise and welcome.

'You here, Dr. Erskine, and on such a broiling afternoon? Well, you *are* kind to come and see us to-day of all days,' and she met him with a frank outstretched hand and an emphatic nod of approbation.

He was a tall, firmly-built man, with a resolute dark face, not lacking in good looks of a stern manly sort; his broad shoulders had the slight stoop inseparable from a student life, his dark eyes, now bent on Christine with a smile, had depths of thought and feeling in them, and could, on occasion, light up with strange fire, transforming his wontedly firm-set, strong features in a manner

which gave him the air of a wrathful demi-god ; but let not my reader tremble at the prospect of much intercourse with so uncomfortable a character ; his fits of anger were rare, and never lightly roused.

Christine's graceful head, crowned with coils of soft brown hair of ruddy bronze tints, just reached his shoulder, her features were faultlessly regular, yet saved from the too statuesque beauty of many regular features by the indescribable vivacity of her expressive grey eyes, and the play of humour and quick intelligence about her lips. There was strength, too, of a subtle feminine sort in the lovely face with its varying colour and delicate outline. The dainty little aquiline nose had sensitive proud muscles which could dilate the small nostrils very haughtily when their owner was offended ; the rosy mouth could settle into a very determined compression quite as impressive as our doctor's own.

But as yet the prosperous Mr. Brownlee's

petted only daughter had found little occasion for defiance or discontent. The truth is she had been tacitly allowed to reign supreme in the household ever since she had come home from school, bringing new sunshine into the rather dull home through her beauty and gaiety and quick-witted chatter. Her father, who delighted in her with a species of admiring fondness no mere ordinary daughter would have awakened in the paternal bosom, supported her wishes with all the might of his authority; her mother, too indolent and lackadaisical to wield the household sceptre satisfactorily, made no stand against Christine's assumption of it; Hugh gave in his allegiance with all the goodwill in the world; and people said that the fact of the beauty's finding herself a spoiled princess in her own little circle explained why at twenty-three she was still only Miss Brownlee, of Woodend.

'I am very glad to see you, Dr. Erskine,' spoke Captain Brownlee, when it became his turn to shake hands, and a smile lighted up

his bronzed face, which certainly had none of his sister's regular beauty, yet was interesting and intelligent ; ' Christine is too much for my unaided energies this hot afternoon — you are a blessed reinforcement.'

' Don't talk shop, Captain Brownlee,' interposed the girl, hospitably pulling forward a third lounging chair for their visitor ; and her gay little laugh sounded pleasantly in the doctor's ears, unused to household music of the sort.

' What has she been saying or doing ?' he asked, seating himself and fixing his eyes on her.

Indeed, smiling Christine, nonchalantly reclining in her big chair, her slight figure rising out of a cloud-like environment of pale blue and white muslin, her pretty arms partly veiled by soft lace ruffles, was a sight on which a young man's eyes might naturally
• love to dwell, even though he were not over head and ears in love, which I may as well inform you at once our doctor was, though

as yet quite ignorant of the damsel’s feeling for him.

Christine herself replied, shaking her head at her brother in an oracular way.

‘Dr. Erskine,’ she said, ‘our hero is not in a fit condition to give evidence.’

‘I see,’ interrupted the visitor, shaking his head in his turn and significantly pointing towards a quaint old china jug and a couple of tumblers standing on a little table at the captain’s elbow.

‘Only lemonade iced—Christine’s own brewing,’ protested that gentleman, adding hospitably, ‘Tell me what you’d like to drink, Dr. Erskine, before we talk any more. Christine’s nonsense will keep—never mind her.’

‘Ah, he’s trying to change the subject,’ laughed the girl, touching the bell beside her chair to order up refreshments for their caller, and with a quiet but determined shake of her head ignoring his objections; ‘the fact is, poor Hugh does not know what ails him to-day; he is melancholy, tongue-tied, dreamy,

and altogether intolerable as a companion. And you will never guess what is the cause of his sufferings, for he *does* suffer, he can't hide that fact.'

'Stuff and nonsense,' ejaculated the captain, smiling good-humouredly across to the girl, and vainly trying to stop further disclosures by a glance of entreaty which she mischievously disregarded.

Dr. Erskine shook his head and looked interested. 'He has been breaking one of the ten commandments,' ran on Christine, in whom the spirit of mischief was strong that day.

'Don't particularise, Miss Brownlee, or you'll maybe make a mistake,' advised the captain, exchanging a comical glance with his male companion, but the young lady proceeded with perfect self-possession '—the Tenth, Dr. Erskine, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife."'

'Indeed, captain,' commented Dr. Erskine, with a droll cynical gleam in his dark eyes ;

'for my part I find that commandment one of the easiest to keep—I seldom find my neighbour's wife quite to my mind.'

'There are neighbour's wives and neighbours' wives,' laughed Christine, with an emphatic nod. And in his desire to put a bit of a check on the lively damsel, her brother made a hasty retort, which two of the party found decidedly embarrassing.

'Dr. Erskine is not very likely to covet *his neighbour's sister*,' the soldier said very innocently, stirring his lemonade in his awkward way without the use of a left hand to steady the tumbler, and for once he had certainly got the better of sharp-witted Christine.

Dr. Erskine's face flushed suspiciously; and as for the young lady, usually so self-possessed, she grew as red as a peony and was fain to busy herself with the tray which by good luck a servant just then brought in.

What foolish notions might not her brother's provoking speech have suggested to

Dr. Erskine—who, if discreetly held to his *rôle* of confidential family friend, the one she had manœuvred him into assuming, might have gone on with his part contentedly enough. Once or twice before the doctor had certainly shown symptoms of rebellion and restlessness under the yoke of this position, whose tacit restraints she found so admirably suited for holding a lover at arm's length, but it was too bad that Hugh's carelessness should run the risk of hurrying on a crisis already dreaded as likely to be disastrous.

She was not prepared to marry anybody in the meantime : she hoped she would have sufficient strength of mind to refuse a little-known country doctor at *any* time, even although her silly heart might plead for him and her judgment pronounce him, in essentials, all that a man should be ; and then it seemed such a pity to introduce disturbing elements into the sunny calm of their everyday existence, which since Hugh's return and the formation of a closer intimacy with the doctor,

she had found quite sufficiently happy. Oh, why, why could not people let well alone!

So Christine meditated in the minute or two that followed, while her brother, unsuspecting of having committed any enormity, tranquilly sipped his lemonade, and the doctor, recovering from his momentary confusion in which he had failed to perceive hers, directed her how to mix the cooling beverage he specially favoured. It was her habit to render her intimate male acquaintances such hospitable attentions, and she used laughingly to pride herself on her barmaid genius.

She met the doctor half-way, tumbler in hand, as he was coming to the table to take it from her, and by this time her cheeks had cooled down and she looked quite her gay dignified self again—'Queen Christine,' as her brother had christened her years and years ago.

'Drink, and bless me, Dr. Erskine,' she said, with droll solemnity of tone; and the young man's eyes, fixed on her for an instant

with a keen scrutiny, detected no tell-tale embarrassment in her pretty face.

They had been meeting each other very frequently for more than a year past, and Christine had wontedly appeared the frankest of gay damsels, yet he felt that as yet he knew almost nothing of her inner self; the frankness was but a surface charm, and what lay beneath was a riddle to him. She was certainly not wanting in love for her father and mother; she was very fond of her brother Hugh, and in a different way of pitying interest, of her cousin and reputed admirer, Mr. Urquhart of Boghall; was not given to expansive friendships with other young ladies;—there ended our doctor's certain knowledge, but that was no reason why he should not be hopelessly deep in love; quite the contrary indeed, for to a man of his nature mystery was a provocative to interest, and that his mistress should be something of a sphinx but added to her attractions the crowning charm of all.

'To return to our text,' spoke Christine with affected gravity, when they had resumed their former places by the window, 'Lady Jean Grahame's bright eyes have set fire to poor Hugh's heart. It sounds presumptuous; but we can trust you to hold your tongue, Dr. Erskine, and it will do him good to air his sorrows.'

'You are airing them for me, Miss Brownlee,' laughed her brother, amused by her persistency.

'Describe Lady Jean for my benefit. I have not seen her yet, but I met that droll laddie, Tom Drew, on his way home from church and he gave me the news of the arrival of royalty in our midst;' and the doctor, who had once or twice confronted Mr. Grahame with a begging petition (he had found much need of sanitary reform in the district), arched his thick eyebrows and looked quizzical of that stiff-necked potentate.

'I like Mr. Grahame,' put in Hugh Brownlee, rousing up into some animation,

I don't see what people find to grumble at in him ; he is not very bright, or amiable, or generally affable, of course.'

I agree with you there,' interjected Christine, with a curl of her lips, for which the doctor blessed her inwardly.

'But he can't help that, it isn't his nature to be so.'

'Very true,' put in the doctor in the same strain. But the young man was not to be laughed out of his earnestness.

'He does not pretend to be a bit better than he is ; he's true to his friends ; he's always willing to give his money where he sees real need of it, if people will take the trouble to seek his help ; there are scores of worse men than Grahame of Midforrest liked and respected because they've humbugging exteriors, which he has not. I like him,' ended Hugh, in the same emphatic phrase with which he had begun, and indeed he spoke from his heart. A boyish friendship had chanced to spring up between the subject of his praises

and himself, Mr. Brownlee’s position of factor to the late Mr. Grahame having brought their children together, and though since they had reached the age of manhood there had been long lapses in their intercourse, it had yet continued to be kindly and free.

‘I know very little of him, and don’t doubt you have reason to speak as you do, Captain Brownlee,’ said the doctor, impressed by his friend’s evident good faith, but Christine refused to be convinced.

She had come into collision with the gentleman’s strong will on a few occasions in her very youthful days, and retained a decidedly disagreeable impression of him, though circumstances obliged her to keep her dislike in the background, in public, at least.

‘Anyhow we were not speaking of *his* charms, but of Lady Jean’s,’ she remarked, with an impatient tap of her small foot on the carpet, and once more the doctor demanded a description of the lady, drawing from Christine an amusing, graphic sketch of

the forenoon service in which she had, according to her, been the central figure.

'She is lovely, Dr. Erskine, Christine is right there,' the captain allowed himself to admit, with a smile of diversion at his sister's exaggerated version of his own part in the almost universal worship of the fair new divinity; 'she looks half-child and half-woman, as merry as the one and as fond as the other,—you know the sort of creature.'

But the doctor was not listening very attentively, his attention, in fact, being more absorbed by fair Christine than by her brother, and the one who responded was that ever-ready teaser.

'Our hero taking to analysis, Dr. Erskine! He'll be writing sonnets next, and then what will become of me? No more Sunday gossiping, no more joking and laughing and mixing of cunning beverages,' and the beauty heaved a sigh of mock alarm.

'I am always at your service, Miss Brownlee, don't forget that,' spoke the doctor,

in the same jesting strain ; while her brother laughed and stretched himself nonchalantly, wondering for the moment whether his pretty sister had really made an impression on the grave and hard-working fellow, and whether Christine's own maiden fancy had been touched at last.

'Thank you very much, you are too good,' laughed Christine, making her admirer a droll little bow of acknowledgment ; and then the door opened, and there was a general breaking up of the situation, for here were Mr. Brownlee and young Urquhart of Boghall.

'You owe me a kiss, Christine,' said her father in a lowered tone, leaning over the back of her chair, after there had been the usual stir of hand-shaking and salutations incumbent on the arrival of a stranger.

'Why?' asked his daughter succinctly ; and a very close observer might have detected a shadow of displeasure in her tone and in the grave eyes she upturned to him.

'Because I have brought Will over to dinner and made him promise to stay all night,' was the reply which Dr. Erskine caught as he sat silent a little way off.

Mr. Urquhart, too, heard it ; and wheeling round from Captain Brownlee to whom he had been speaking, regarded Christine with a waiting air, a smile in his eyes yet a look of hesitancy about his mouth.

'I am very pleased to see my cousin here,' she said simply, answering his look with a quiet little smile of confiding friendliness, and the new arrival's face lit up while Dr. Erskine's took on a shadow of discontent.

Half unconsciously he fell to studying him in a professional way. A tall, slight, fair-complexioned man, high-shouldered and narrow-chested, whose thin features were lighted up by eyes of unnatural brightness, on whose cheeks was the portentous hectic colouring alternating with extreme pallor. Would he live? No, he was doomed and stamped by Nature as a prey for the grave. But how long

might the struggle for existence go on, aided as the man was by all the resources wealth could purchase—a couple of years, five, ten? The doctor could not pronounce any decision on that point. He had known many cases of marvellous tenacity of life among consumptives.

And then still abstractedly his glance turned to Christine, sitting very quiet and grave in her big chair, over which her father was still leaning talking to her—'pretty Queen Christine,' dowered with such healthful loveliness, such gay spirits, such bright intelligence!

Were her family capable of sacrificing her? Was she capable of sacrificing herself in an unnatural marriage, merely for the sake of a paltry rise in social position, the gain of a few thousand pounds or so of marriage settlements and widow's jointure? Once more the doctor found himself unable to answer decidedly.

There followed a little general conversa-

tion in which he had some difficulty in creditably sustaining his part. His mood had changed, and the shadow of a great fear came creeping over his heart.

The sensation was not altogether new to him, but never before had he felt its baneful influence so strongly as this afternoon, which had begun so enchantingly—thanks to the witching spell of Christine's presence and gay friendliness. He wanted but to get away now, to reach the solitary security of his own dingy library and indulge his gloomy fancies unmolested, if he should find it impossible to throw himself into some absorbing study, so, though invited to stay to dinner, he declined, excusing his refusal as best he could.

Was he growing morbidly suspicious or had Mr. Brownlee, for his part, given him the invitation in a lukewarm way, as if under the compulsion of politeness? Again our poor doctor was at a loss to know, but none the less he grew more depressed and graver in aspect.

As he went up to Christine to bid her good-bye she noticed this and was sorry. In spite of herself her eyes were upturned for an instant in a glance of enquiring concern, and she let her hand lie in his longer than was absolutely necessary. Her father had moved away, and she was standing a little apart from the rest, in the curtained embrasure of a window, sufficiently distant, indeed, to make the exchange of a confidential word or two possible. An irresistible heart-hunger seized on the young man, prompting some passionate speech which yet he did not dare to utter ; so he kept a strange silence, merely looking at her in a waiting way she knew very well how to interpret.

Her colour deepened and her eyes fell to the floor.

'Come back again soon,' she said softly ; and the simple phrase, which might mean much or nothing, sounded in the doctor's ears as an enigma on whose solution his peace of mind depended : try to solve it he must.

'So you are pleased to see *me*, too,' he asked, seizing the first words which occurred to him; and Christine perceived that her path of life was becoming unpleasantly obstructed by the conflicting claims of other people upon her, and that Dr. Gordon Erskine was likely to be one of her biggest worries.

'Of course I am,' she said, still without lifting her glance.

'*Really?*' persisted the doctor with a suspicion of a tremble in the simple trisyllable which gave it a quite peculiar significance.

Christine would not commit herself by repeating a word thus spoken. The foolish fellow might go away believing her pledged to some more than merely friendly relationship with him, and, as I have already said, she was not prepared for any such revolution in her calm existence. She laughed and substituted, 'On my honour, Dr. Erskine,' in the most light-hearted tone her voice would assume.

And then the poor fellow committed a crowning folly by fairly losing his temper, and saying in his most satirical and gloomy manner,

‘*On your honour*, Miss Brownlee! I don’t well know what that means. I have not yet found out by experience what a woman’s notions of honour are.’

Christine looked up then, considerable *hauteur* in her expression. Her admirer was certainly giving himself tragic airs, excusable only in the case of an accepted lover, on which ‘vantage ground she never meant to place any but an exceptional *parti*; such failing to present himself, then, as Aggie Drew had declared, she would content herself with a life of single blessedness. Such at least was her present idea. She plumed herself on being a young lady of rare prudence and freedom from sentimentalism.

‘Good-bye, Dr. Erskine,’ she said, quite loud enough for the rest to hear; and she accompanied the word with a dignified

little bow of dismissal not to be misunderstood.

'Good-bye, Miss Brownlee,' returned the doctor, in much the same manner; and mightily offended, though too proud to show his resentment, he got through his other adieux and walked off, escorted by the captain to the hall-door and dismissed with a hearty hand-shake, which, alas! could not avail to comfort him.

'What have you been doing to the doctor, Christine? He has taken his departure scowling portentously.'

So spoke Mr. Urquhart's voice close by her ear, and turning round from the window she perceived that her father and brother had quitted the drawing room and that they two were alone. She drew a long breath and looked up into his face with a suspicion of wistfulness in her wontedly gay glance.

'Don't bother me, Will, I am tired; sit down and talk to me sensibly.'

Mr. Urquhart obeyed the wave of her

little hand and seated himself on the couch beside her, inly pondering whether Christine’s tiredness, a strange complaint for *her* to raise, and Dr. Erskine’s scowling might have any mutual connection. He, too, was in the dark as to what his fair cousin’s intentions as to the disposal of her future might be, and he had no small interest in their discovery. As the young Drews had shrewdly guessed, the beauty might have been Mrs. Urquhart of Boghall long ere now, might be so any day she liked to assume the glories of the position, sufficiently attractive in the estimation of many scheming parents and their daughters, even with the drawback of a husband in precarious health.

‘*You* tired, Christine? The world is turning upside down, I fear,’ he said, after a momentary silence; and his voice was very gentle and sympathetic.

‘Ah, Will,’ she said, in sober earnest for once at least, ‘don’t be like all the rest. Don’t suppose that because I’m not given to

pulling a long face every time anything vexing occurs, I'm not made of the same material as my neighbours.'

'But what has occurred to vex you to-day—not my coming, surely, Christine?'

His coming? No, most certainly. Her good, faithful friend and cousin might come as often as ever he liked; the root of bitterness was not that, but the conviction that her father was plotting a marriage between her and him solely for the sake of the wealth and position he could assure to his wife and, what was more important, to his widow. When I own that until lately she herself, though by no means in love, had felt no insuperable unwillingness to let her wealthy cousin slip into a husband's place, it will be seen that her resentment was rather unreasonable.

'Your coming! For shame, Will!' and Christine held out her hand to him with a look of reproach he found very comforting.

'The doctor's *going*, then,' with a forced laugh and an uneasy study of her expression.

'Quite so—you've hit the nail on the head this time,' was her retort, and she nodded gaily, defiant of his attempt to sound her.

'I am no match for your cunning, I never was, Christine,' he owned, after a little more thrusting and parrying; and then they fell to speaking of matters requiring less skilful handling—his health, which he declared much better; his place, where, for years back, he had been accustomed to order all improvements according to Christine's taste; the books they had each been reading of late, the music they had most delight in (the couple had no lack of decided tastes in common), till by-and-by the dressing bell sounded and broke up their *tête-à-tête*, too soon for Mr. Urquhart's liking.

'You always do me good, Christine,' he told her, with one of his pathetic smiles as they were leaving the drawing-room together; and the girl's heart was touched, though she only laughed and made some jesting reply. In her heart she vowed that at least she

would be betrayed into no cold-blooded calculations of sordid selfish interests in her relationships with this man, whom she had all along found so worthy of her liking and respect ; if worldly ambition must be her motive power, at all events it should impel her in some other direction than that towards which her father's schemes tended, and Dr. Erskine's experience of ' what a woman's notions of honour were ' must be gained, if gained at all, in some other field of observation than the one he had apparently marked out for himself.

Half an hour later Christine descended to dinner in her simple, yet elegant evening toilette and in full possession of her wonted cheerful composure ; she magnanimously overlooked her father's offence, took pains to bring her mother's spirits up to an endurable pitch, watched over the edible and drinkable comforts of the party with a grave yet graceful solicitude all her own, sustained the life of the table by her bright talk and

ready listening powers, and, in short, performed to perfection, that by no means easy habitual rôle of hers, the personification of the many gifts and graces expected in civilised society from that very conspicuous character, 'the young lady of the house.'

CHAPTER IV.

ANTOINETTE AND AUNT BARBARA.

‘THERE, child, get up and let me look at you. Why, you’ve grown into a woman all in a minute, and not a plain one either, upon my word,’ spoke Mrs. Kirkwood of Southfield, in the triumphant tone of one who has achieved a success, and so speaking she sank into a chair and heaved a sigh of unmistakable fatigue.

‘Thank you very much, Aunt Barbara,’ answered her niece Antoinette, getting up as desired, and throwing off the white dressing wrap in which she had for the last hour been enveloped, while her aunt (a lady in whose eyes attention to a girl’s toilette and *coiffure* was a duty almost as binding as that of forming her religious principles) had been

brushing out and arranging in two or three different styles the luxuriant, shining masses of her dark brown hair.

The couple were alone in Antoinette's bedroom, a pretty, cool-looking chamber on whose adornment childless Aunt Barbara had spared no pains, when, a little more than a year ago, her orphan niece had come home to her for good and all. Her only brother's child should miss no sign of consideration, no refining environment of pretty things befitting the young lady estate on which she was about to enter under her auspices. Her only brother, indeed, had been a source of no little disappointment and irritation during his life, having to the disgust of his family deserted the lucrative brewing business in which his father had made a large fortune, for the precarious profession of an artist, and having followed up this provoking step by a marriage with a poor and insignificant French girl and a final settling down into obscure life in a country town of the south of France. Still his offences

were of no recent date and might well be buried in the far away foreign grave where he and his long-lost wife lay at rest. The child their improvidence or ill-luck had thrown almost penniless on the mercies of his only surviving near relative, his widowed sister, should not be held at arm's length because of them. So Mrs. Kirkwood adopted the strange, shy, half-foreign little damsel into a daughter's place in her well-ordered genteel household, and tried her best to do the same for her in her heart, with what measure of success I leave the reader to discover, along with the manner in which this exotic human shoot took to its new soil and atmosphere.

Antoinette, as I have said, got up as desired, and obeying her aunt's directions turned round and round as on a pivot in a slow, mechanical way, until told that no more was required of her. One glance at the mirror had sufficed for herself, yet she was decidedly a pretty girl who might have been pardoned for indulging in a study of her own

attractions, especially on a day which most young creatures would have considered an era in existence, the day of her formal entry into acknowledged young ladyhood in all the newly-assumed dignity of a trained skirt and orthodox fashionable *coiffure*...

Aunt Barbara saw her indifference and was naturally vexed.

'I never saw such an odd girl as you are, Antoinette. One would think you were dreaming with your eyes open, as I dare say you are. I do wish you could be more like other people, and show some interest in the things any young girl would naturally care for.'

Thus she spoke with decidedly more heat than she was in the habit of introducing into her often-recurring little rebukes, and her companion flushed in a sensitive, hurt way, and turned a half-angry, half-pleading glance upon her.

'I do not care much for these things—why should I pretend to care for them? You

would not like me to grow a hypocrite, Aunt Barbara ?'

'Tut, tut,' said Aunt Barbara impatiently, 'don't begin with tragedy airs ; all I ask of you is to be a little more like a practical, sensible Scotch girl.'

'But I am not Scotch,' asserted Antoinette in a low tone, suggestive of repressed tears.

And Mrs. Kirkwood, extremely displeased by what struck her as the unprovoked ill-humour of her *protégée*, rose to leave her, saying a little sharply, 'On your father's side you are, I'm thankful to say,' a speech which her niece resented as disparaging of the mother who to her embodied all womanly virtues and graces.

She made no further retort, however ; indeed she was not in the habit of openly rebelling ; and, bidding her make haste to finish her dressing, the widow quitted the room with her wonted stately rustle of sweeping black robes.

Left alone, Antoinette flung herself into an easy chair and dully thought over her aunt's words. Odd, dreamy, unlike other girls, she was certainly all that, and her aunt might truly have added a list of much more disagreeable adjectives : ' idle except when she found congenial employment, unsociable with the generality of mortals and indifferent to their interests, easily offended, and slow to forgive.' Yet in the dear old days, in the far-off sunny land, of which sleeping and waking she dreamed so often, nobody had seemed sensible of her faults, or at least had deemed them of grave consequence. Love had been her atmosphere, love and a quiet, unceasing, worship of the beautiful wherever met with throughout the wide-spreading domains of nature and of art.

She shut her eyes and let her memory conjure up a scene from her old life—the quaint, red-tiled old *château* on the slope of an olive-covered hill, at whose base glittered in a flood of southern sunshine the deep blue

waters of the Mediterranean—the winding path, overshadowed by high and wide-spreading olive trees, which led to the picturesque little town with its narrow streets sleeping in great glooming shadows and its couple of gay sunny squares where the stir of the place was to be found—the dark-browed, stately young peasant women, with roses in their black hair and bright kerchiefs on their broad bosoms, the bare-legged, red-cowled fishermen, the priests in their flapping gowns, the white-veiled sisters of charity—all these long unfamiliar figures rose up before her, moving hither and thither as she had been wont to see them.

And then she heard her father's deep tender voice calling her, 'Toinette,' 'little Tonie,' '*m'amie*,' any foolish pet name his fancy prompted, and she must look at this glorious burnished beetle he had found in the vineyard, or that wonderful effect of light and shadow on the distant mountain peak, or that charming, tattered, little beggar lad whose smile he must catch for his next picture—ah !

there was no possibility of long withdrawals into her own solitary musings then—no scarcity of pleasant, varying occupations to fill the fair, laughter-gladdened days passing all too quickly under these lofty, sunny skies amid the soft shade of these well-remembered grey olives—and the girl's great, dark eyes,—the chief beauty in her little brunette face—filled with irrepressible tears as that thought woke her up to a consciousness of her sadly-altered surroundings, of the weary ache at her heart, whose cravings no stores of fondly-cherished memories could still, which cried out for present *love*, and would not be comforted by any amount of Aunt Barbara's laborious, duty-prompted attentions.

What did she care for her pretty room with its soft carpet and costly curtains and luxurious appointments of every kind? Her own little chamber under the eaves, with its bare floor and rickety, faded furniture of heavy, antique form, had not wanted for beauty in the bright, bygone days when she

used to delight in making it gay with flowers and simple white draperies contrived out of her discarded muslin frocks.

Aunt Barbara might pass an hour arranging her hair in elegant fashionable style, many hours in planning the dainty costume of white piqué and rose trimmings which lay unheeded on the bed—to her thinking she would never look so pretty as she used to do when only awkward old Félicie, their one woman-servant, ever paid any serious attention to her wardrobe details—and *she* thought her equipped right fitly for state appearances in a well-starched cotton frock and faded sash, while her hair was free to fall at will over her little figure.

My reader will see that Mrs. Kirkwood's orphan niece had not taken kindly to her transplanting, and that the poor lady, already sorely laden with self-imposed burdens partly charitable and partly social—for she was one of the numerous class who do their utmost to serve those two irreconcilable rivals, 'God

and Mammon'—was likely to have hard work to convert this carelessly-reared, much-petted child of odd artist parents into a creditable member of the prosaic, untravelled, narrow-minded little world of Langtoun.

A tap at her door reminded Antoinette of her aunt's parting injunction, and, crying 'Come in' in rather a guilty tone, she hurried to put on her new dress, trembling in the prospect of a reprimand for her dilatoriness.

But it was only the under housemaid, a simple, good-natured Highland girl, for whom Antoinette had conceived a shy liking. She stared in alarm at the backward state of toilette in which she discovered the young lady, whom she had been sent to summon to a waiting carriage.

'Eh, Miss Kirkwood, put it iss ferry far pehind ye'll pe,' she exclaimed, in great concern, as she hurried to give her help to the incomprehensible fair damsel, who seemingly did not care enough for a big, dressy pic-nic to ensure her being ready in time; 'and your

aunt padé me tell you to come down tirectly, pecause a shentleman iss waiting to take you away with him in a praw carriage and two ferry ponny grey peasties.'

Here was a new source of alarm to shy Antoinette, who, invited to Mrs. Dr. Dawson's annual pic-nic at Avon Glen, had not sufficiently considered the details of the great event—who should take her, who should bring her home, &c. ?

'What gentleman, Flora ?' she asked, as she made a rush towards the high and roomy wardrobe, where, doubtless, careful Aunt Barbara had laid out in order all that she needed to put on for the day.

But Flora did not know, and Antoinette was left to form her own conclusions, from the fact that 'he wass a ferry praw shentleman who carried his head high like a soger, and the peasties wass ferry like them Miss Brownlee drove.'

So she was to have Captain Brownlee for a cavalier, and set off alone with him in veri-

table grown-up young lady fashion—after all, she was glad Aunt Barbara had taken care she should not look like a dowdy schoolgirl, and her spirits began to rise to the level of the occasion.

Flora's raptures, too, were decidedly encouraging. 'Eh, put you iss wonderful ponny this morning, Miss Kirkwood! and there will not pe another young leddy like you mirover in your praw gown and red ribbons.'

Antoinette, in all her hurry, remembered to take a parting survey of herself from head to foot in her great mirror, of which, on ordinary occasions, she was very neglectful; and there came a pleased sparkle into her dark eyes, and a becoming colour to her softly rounded cheeks, for there was no doubt whatever about it—the slim, youthful lady in dainty white attire, who looked gravely out of its depths at her, was a very pretty lady indeed.

She looked so well that Aunt Barbara, although displeased at the tardiness of her

appearance, refrained from any fault-finding. Antoinette attributed this unexpected good luck to the presence of a third party—the gentleman she had expected to find awaiting her—Captain Brownlee, and was grateful to him accordingly. In her shy, demure way, which sat well on her, she made her apology for being late, and listened to his explanations of his appearance on the scene.

An unexpected stranger had arrived to Mrs. Dawson that very morning, and that sorely-perplexed matron had thought it best to take the intruder into her own family road party, and leave Miss Kirkwood to the Brownlees' charge.

'Captain Brownlee brought me a note from Mrs. Dawson explaining it all—you're in very good hands,' added Aunt Barbara with her sweetest smile, and then the soldier laughed ruefully.

'One hand,' he commented, glancing down at his helpless left arm in its sling.

'And you are perfectly sure the ponies

will go quietly ?' questioned Mrs. Kirkwood, in some alarm, as she stood on the house-steps watching the pair of young people mount.

'Perfectly sure, Mrs. Kirkwood. But to make your mind quite easy, I promise to give Christine the driving seat the moment she joins us,' answered the young man, good-humouredly ; then as they drove off, he added, in a reassuring voice to Antoinette, who was a bit of a coward, and was not yet versed in the womanly art of hiding her sensations, 'Don't be afraid—my one arm is a strong one, and you are as safe as possible.'

Antoinette smiled and looked up into his kindly, brown face with one of her grave observant glances, then cast down her dark eyes, quite satisfied with the result of her scrutiny.

'I like you,' she would have told him quite frankly a couple of years or so ago, when she was much-petted, little-fearing, childish French 'Toinette,—'I like you,' she said *inwardly* now, and the fact of her having

found some one to like at the very outset of her first independent step into the untrodden path of her grown-up young-ladyhood, sent a pleasant warmth to her heart.

'You are a pleasant little woman, after all I have heard of your odd hold-off ways,' was the speech the Captain mentally addressed to her as he returned her smiling look; and Antoinette had quite time to read his thought in the instant that elapsed ere she lowered her own glance.

'We shall be friends,' was the next assertion Miss Kirkwood made to herself; the poor child had, in the repression and dulness of this last year of her life, acquired a habit of holding mental colloquies.

Her one-armed cavalier managed his pretty little greys with apparent ease. The sun shone out pleasantly, its strength agreeably modified by a veil of fleecy white clouds; the morning freshness was still in the air; as the smart, light equipage flew along, people came to their doors and windows to

look admiringly at it—after all, Antoinette discovered that she could enjoy a drive of this sort remarkably well.

She said so frankly to her companion, who was vastly amused by the childlike *naïveté* of her admission, and cast another kindly glance at her. He was decidedly awkward and cowardly with young ladies of either the flirting or the prudish type, but he was the very reverse when sure of having found a female neighbour who was undesigning and natural. He warmed into friendly interest at once, now that the girl had made her unstudied first advance.

‘My sister and I shall come and drive you out with us sometimes, if you would like it, Miss Kirkwood,’ he said; ‘I wonder we never thought of it before. Mrs. Kirkwood won’t object, I’m sure.’

The youthful face lighted up into radiance, and she spoke a fervent ‘I hope not,’ which made the captain smile once more.

‘You find it dull at Southfield, I dare say,’

he said sympathetically ; then, fearing he had been guilty of a prying rudeness very far removed from his intention, he added in haste, ' I mean, you must find life at Langtoun very dull, after being accustomed to Continental ways.'

Antoinette was too much of a child to understand his scruples.

' It is not that,' she explained, upturning serious eyes to his, ' I have always lived very quietly, only now—' there came a perceptible tremble in the clear, youthful voice—' everything seems changed ; I don't feel as if I belonged to anybody ; not in the way I used to, when papa was alive ; and—' the tremble grew decided enough to alarm and distress the young man, whose heart was a very soft one—' Aunt Barbara does not understand.'

' I am very sorry,' was all Antoinette's cavalier could find to say on the moment ; but he made that simple speech with such an air of unfeigned sincerity, and accompanied it with so kind a glance, that she felt comforted.

Nay, what was rare for her now-a-days, she forgot herself completely for a little space, in a disinterested regret at having said what had cast a shadow over her companion's cheerfulness. With a swift movement of her small hand across her eyes, she brushed away a couple of unshed tears, then exercising a stern control of her voice, she made a soothing remark for his benefit.

'Still Aunt Barbara is a very good woman, and kind to me—in her way,' she added, with her characteristic downrightness, which rebelled against any statement of a case so constructed as to convey a false conviction to a listener.

'Of course, of course,' Captain Brownlee hastened to respond; then, to his relief, he became aware of the approach of a couple of riders—they might serve very opportunely to change the subject of conversation for one more appropriate to the morning of a young lady's entrance upon such gay life as genteel Langtoun had to offer.

'See, Miss Kirkwood, here come Mr. Grahame and Lady Jean—they have taken to regular morning rides, I see,' he said, drawing his ponies a little to one side of the highroad; and Antoinette needed no second rousing into attention, but looked with all her eyes, vastly interested in the lovely lady who seemed, to her girlish imagination, a very queen of romance dropped from the clouds into the prosaic world of Langtoun, where she had as yet discovered but a very few individuals worthy of her interest.

'How beautiful she is!' she said, in childlike enthusiasm, turning for sympathy to her companion, who made a cordial assent, without removing his admiring gaze from Lady Jean, still sufficiently distant to be unconscious of it.

Indeed the young mistress of Midforrest was looking her very best as, mounted on a prancing chestnut, whose management gave her abundant opportunity of exhibiting her equestrian skill, she came riding towards

them, turning her head every other moment to throw back a laughing glance and jesting remark to Mr. Grahame, whose horse had fallen a few steps into the rear. Her dark blue habit displayed to perfection her shapely pliant figure ; her eyes beamed, her cheeks glowed more charmingly than ever under the shadow of her high black hat of orthodox masculine form ; the little hand which grasped the reins so firmly, as obeying her husband's request she drew up when they had got close to the carriage, had a new charm in its Amazonian gauntleted glove.

So at least thought Captain Brownlee, who since the Grahames' settling down at Midforrest, now some three weeks ago, had chanced to have several opportunities of seeing the lady in all the witchery of her dinner toilettes, backed by the dignified yet engaging position of dispenser of hospitalities in her own luxurious home.

'Where are you bound for?' demanded Mr. Grahame, in his *brusque* fashion, when

Lady Jean and he had exchanged salutations with Captain Brownlee, and, as Antoinette perceived with a sensation of shy embarrassment, surveyed herself with some interest.

Lady Jean, noticing this, kindly came to her relief.

‘Introduce this young lady to me—though indeed we are not altogether strangers, having several times looked each other out at church,’ she presently said, breaking into the middle of the gentlemen’s colloquy; and Captain Brownlee did as he was desired, very much gratified by her ladyship’s amiable condescension.

‘I hope you will come over to Midforrest some fine day, and let us become better acquainted, my dear,’ Lady Jean said, in quite a pretty motherly way, which highly amused Mr. Grahame, towards whom she turned with a glance which ordered him to second the invitation without delay.

‘Do,’ he ejaculated, then stopped short,

unable at the moment to recall the name of the insignificant, if ladylike, youthful being whom his capricious Jenny had, with her usual absence of prudent consideration, adopted into her friendly graces.

‘I thank you both very much,’ Antoinette said simply, yet with a well-bred little bow and frank smile, which, along with her becoming costume, prepossessed Mr. Grahame in her favour.

‘It would be hard to tell the difference between that girl and a lady,’ he owned to Lady Jean, as they rode on again in company, having made Hugh Brownlee blessed with a pressing invitation to dinner on the morrow.

Lady Jean was amused in her turn, and bestowed upon his big and square-built figure a side glance of merry mischief, which he caught and interpreted rightly.

‘You think I’m stiff-backed and disagreeably proud,’ he commenced, argumentatively; but his wife gaily cut him short.

'There is no doubt about that, Harry,' and a peal of silvery laughter, in which he was fain to join her for sympathy sake, rang pleasantly out.

'Let me tell you, Jenny,' he resumed, when she was quiet again, 'you're going to do no end of mischief here if you will persist in being hand and glove with everybody, male or female, who happens to strike your fancy. The good people of Langtoun proper are quite ineligible acquaintances for us, no matter how superior some of them may be ;' and unconsciously Mr. Grahame held his well-shaped and prominent nose a couple of inches higher than was his wont, and let his face assume its most supercilious expression.

Lady Jean laughed out more merrily than ever, and fearlessly rallied him on his high and mighty air.

'I am going to tell you a secret, sir,' she announced, after they had ridden on a little way in silence, broken only by the clatter of

their horses' hoofs. 'I have conceived a plot since I last spoke. You needn't laugh. I am in mighty earnest, and you will have to help me to work out my idea. Guess what it is,' and she cocked her head on one side, and glanced archly up into his quizzical face.

'I never could guess cleverly all my life, and I'm too old to begin now at four-and-thirty—speak out like a man, Jenny,' laughed her lord, with a sigh for the many lost years when he had not known his pretty darling; and thus adjured she unfolded her plan.

'You mean to have that young man, Brownlee, a deal about the place—our place, don't you, now?' was her introductory question, which rather puzzled him.

'I do, when he is at home and I can get him—that is, if you have no objections, Jenny.'

Jenny raised her eyebrows comically. Captain Brownlee's seemed to be the only male society of the neighbourhood for which her husband cared, yet here he was ready to

give up this resource against *ennui*, not to say this valued friendship, if her caprices should call for the sacrifice.

'*Me* have objections!' she exclaimed, rebukingly, 'he is a very fine fellow, and I like him extremely—on the contrary, my plot is for his benefit. There now!' and she nodded emphatically.

'Then you're planning a marriage for him, of course, Jenny. I know your match-making propensities.'

'Quite so,' she assented gaily. 'Now listen. This little Kirkwood girl is pretty, and interesting, and ladylike, and will have lots of money, won't she?' And afraid lest she might be under a delusion on this point, she turned for corroboration to her companion, who was divertedly listening to the unfolding of her scheme.

'Lots, after her aunt's death, anyhow—the accumulated wealth of two or three generations of brewers, who never took time to spend their own money, as I have heard,'

Mr. Grahame assented ; and thus supported, she ran on with amusing earnestness,

‘ His father is making money fast, people say—he too will be pretty rich some day. There is only one sister to portion, where would he be likely to find a more suitable wife, or she a finer fellow as a husband ? It would be a kindness to throw these young people in each other’s way ; and what is more, *I mean to do it*, Harry.’ There she paused, breathless.

‘ How ? ’ queried her husband, only telling himself that the idea was not a bad one—poor Brownlee had been knocked about in India and Africa more than was good for him, and would do well to settle down into comfortable matrimony.

‘ I shall tell you how,’ said Jenny, with dignity. ‘ Hugh Brownlee is your *protégé*—don’t contradict, you know what I mean—well, the girl is to be my *protégée*. I delight in having a nice, refined young creature about me to amuse myself with when I have

nothing else to do, and young girls all take to me easily. Leave me to manage the bringing of our pair of *protégés* together. There!' And Lady Jean nodded with the air of a wiseacre.

'See that you don't bungle the affair, my lady. I don't feel sure of your matchmaking abilities, and for my part I decline to meddle. Managing other people's affairs is not in my line,' Mr. Grahame remarked, in a somewhat dubious tone.

'No, of course not, because you don't care a fig for other people, me excepted,' the gay voice proclaimed, with another laugh. Then its owner, following a mischievous impulse which just then occurred to her, gave the spur to her astonished horse, and, flinging back a challenge to her companion, was off like the wind; his heavier bay was not long in receiving a like surprise, and in the inspiriting race which ensued the happy young couple speedily forgot everything but the excitement of the swift motion, the fun of

the novel pursuit, watched with amazement by the quiet folks of the straggling Langtoun suburb they had just quitted.

And thus thoughtlessly was laid by Lady Jean Grahame's kindly little hand the foundation of an intimacy, which for one at least of the couple concerned was to be as an overpowering current sweeping into its waters, like the helpless driftwood of a stream, all the hopes and affections and interests of a lifetime, most of whose years were yet to run.

'Yes, she is really a beauty—what a pleasure it is to see one!' remarked little Antoinette, with a sigh of content as Lady Jean's figure, watched while it continued in sight, had disappeared in a bend of the road; and, laughingly owning that her neck ached with the strain she had put upon it in staring back at the riders, she wheeled round to her companion. But, to her surprise, she perceived that his mood had changed. He did not answer her, or seem to notice that she

had spoken. His look was fixed on his ponies, and a shadow of great gravity had fallen on his face. Inwardly he was vexed with a strange new sensation of unrest he could not well have explained. He would have liked to escape from it by throwing himself into some whirl of action, no matter what, from leading a charge to chasing a fox across country, and lo! here he was at the gate of Woodend, with no better excitement in prospect than that irksome Dawson pic-nic.

'Your arm must be tired doing so much double work,' Antoinette's soft-toned voice said pityingly, as she stood at the hall-door, where a young groom took the ponies in charge, he helped her to alight, and then he remembered that he was not alone—the helping her down had been but a mechanical action—and, ashamed of his selfish engrossment, answered her with a friendly smile and word.

And then Christine stepped forward, looking very pretty and gay and ready to

engage in any amount of banter ; and for the time his gloomy fancies disappeared like mists before the risen sun.

‘ Come in and see mamma for a few minutes, Miss Kirkwood. You’d better come and show yourself too, Hugh. She has been in terror lest my ponies should be the death of her “soger laddie,” ’ Christine said ; and so there was a general move for the drawing-room.

A quarter of a hour later the trio were on the road, Christine in her glory as driver making her ponies fly at their briskest pace, and doing her best to forget that life had for her any more engrossing interests than those for the moment held out to her, the coming events of the pic-nic at Avon Glen.

What they turned out my next chapter must tell.

CHAPTER V.

A RACE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

AVON GLEN was a romantic little valley about ten miles from Langtoun. Through it ran the Avon, a rushing stream which now sped swiftly along in a deep rocky channel, now leaped merrily down a moss-overgrown flinty step, now spread itself in little pools and rivulets over a wide pebbly bed stretching out to the very edge of the hilly green pastures, and ministering no little solace to the thirsty cattle that in the summer heats used to stand knee-deep in its cool waters.

The sloping sides of the glen thickly clothed with plantations of fir and pine were intersected by various narrow footpaths; a pleasant shady strip of grassy woodland bordered the river in the foreground, and here

had the Langtoun pic-nickers, headed by the respectable matrons, Mrs. Dawson and Mrs. Drew, pitched their camp on this fair summer day of which I have been speaking.

With the exception of these two ladies they were all young people, a score or so in number, and belonged to the acknowledged *élite* of the town society. Sorely was the mind of the good doctor's lady exercised on the occasions when her conscience warned her that she was already deeply in debt to the party-giving public of her neighbourhood, and that a return festivity of some sort was inevitable. Skilful was the diplomacy which could preserve the intimate circle of the doctor's family and acquaintance from any admixture of the vulgar element, yet create no enemies amongst the numerous well-to-do tradespeople, on whose support the bread and butter of the professional household might be said to depend. After much bitter experience Mrs. Dawson had hit upon a system of tactics which seemed the least productive of heart-

burnings and estrangement of profitable patients. She divided her social world into two *castes*, and studiously endeavoured to render her hospitalities to both in a manner which would be offensive to neither. In her highest caste was included only a small number of the *crème de la crème* of the town : public opinion acknowledged the existence of such an untitled aristocracy and its claims to exclusiveness. Her secondary caste comprised the whole body of aspiring townspeople who choose to call in the doctor : in their honour she gave a couple of large evening parties annually ; and although a few malcontents held off in offended dignity, the great majority were sensible enough to recognise that admission to the drawing-room of so distinguished a personage as the doctor's lady was a privilege about whose acceptance it would be imprudent to make any stickling conditions.

And so it came about that Mrs. Dawson was entertaining so charmingly select a body

of young ladies and gentlemen in this pretty rural spot, yet that the doctor, a man of nervous and timid temperament was going about his professional work with no overwhelming fear of encountering black looks from slighted fellow townspeople.

Hampers were unpacked, water was discovered and fetched from a neighbouring spring with much laughter and enjoyment by an active squad, a great fire was kindled, a couple of tablecloths were spread out on the sward under the shade of some venerable pines, the young men ran hither and thither carrying dishes, drawing troublesome corks, paying gallant attentions to the ladies—'no servants' was one of the rules of this gathering—eating and drinking and merry jesting over the startling irregularities of the table arrangements went on with a zest which even the anxious responsible elders found to be infectious.

Then, lunch over, there was a general dispersion of the forces, some to visit the

little hamlet where the horses had been put up, some to wander about the wood and pick wild flowers, some to dawdle at the river-bank and watch the rippling waters gleam in the sunlight.

Of these last was Christine Brownlee. She had managed to give the slip to her admirers, the majority of the few young gentlemen whom the pic-nic party boasted, and had wandered up the river-side, sunk in a dreamy mood now that the eye of the public was not upon her and she could safely indulge her own inclinations. While the lunch was going on she had, as was her wont, been gay and sociable enough.

Christine had sustained a disappointment that forenoon, and was not able to be quite herself. Dr. Gordon Erskine, who had been expected to join the party, had not entered an appearance and was not likely to do so now. She missed him more than she liked to own to herself. Last year he had been there, he had kept as close to her side as he could

safely do without attracting general notice, he had scrambled about the rocks and the hill-side gathering ferns and flowers for her, he had been frank and gay and lovable, as he could be on occasions.

So thinking, the young lady seated herself on a mossy fallen trunk close by the brink of the water and took to pensively throwing into its current—very swift at this spot—the flowers she had gathered a minute before.

Why had he not come to-day when he knew *she* was to be there? It was very inattentive and unfriendly on his part, the more so because he had not seen her for so long—three whole weeks, during which she had been away from home visiting—and the last time they had met (the reader will remember the occasion) they had been silly enough to quarrel. She had meant to make it up with him at this pic-nic, in some quiet moment when they were alone together; and lo! he had spoiled her little plot. He was seriously offended, no doubt, the stubborn

provoking fellow, and he wanted to avoid her. Well, let him recover his temper when it suited him ; she was not going to demean herself by advances.

And just as she had reached this stage in her reflections and cast the last of the flowers into the stream, her eye chanced to fall on some lovely blue forget-me-nots growing at her very feet, and her mood underwent a sudden revolution.

Just this day a year ago he had brought her a fair little bunch of these very flowers, and though he had laughed when he offered them, and she had accepted them in the same affectedly careless way, both of them had felt at the moment that they had pledged themselves to be something more than mere ordinary acquaintances.

And was he then altogether inexcusable when he had been cross and rude on the occasion of his seeing her with poor Will Urquhart, whom he had no doubt heard spoken of as likely to marry her if he lived ?

No. Undoubtedly she had been unwise in letting him form hopes which circumstances would, she felt very certain, prevent him from realising. Circumstances! bah, why shirk the facing of the naked truth?—her own will would be the shaping power of her destiny so far as marriage with one or other of these men went—her own will guided by ambition or—yes, it was quite time to be honest with herself—guided by that as yet half-comprehended power, Love.

“Hullo, Miss Brownlee! Well, you are a nice young lady, hiding away from everybody like this!”

Such was the prosaic interruption of Christine’s mental self-scrutiny, and, looking up with a perceptible start, she saw that close by her side stood the slim boyish figure of Tom Drew, his eyes fixed on her face with a decidedly curious expression.

Tom Drew was rather a favourite of hers, but at the same time she had some fear of his penetration, which she had learned to

respect through some previous experience of it.

She became her gay self in an instant, and answered him in a mocking tone, inviting him by a gesture to seat himself beside her on the mossy trunk.

‘Could you not guess that I meant you to seek me out, Tom?’

‘Aha, I know better,’ affirmed Tom, taking the offered place and looking mischievously at her; ‘you don’t care a fig for anybody who is at the pic-nic to-day, my worthy self included.’

‘Nonsense, Tom!’ But fair Christine’s cheeks took on a suspicious tinge of deeper colouring. She felt that they would presently be at close quarters.

Tom kept silence for a full half minute; then as his companion feigned to be attentively examining a ladybird she had captured, he made a startling remark, hoping, by watching its effect, to settle some troublesome doubts of his once for all.

‘Look here, Miss Brownlee, I wonder why Dr. Erskine isn’t here to day.’

‘So do I,’ echoed the beauty, smiling calmly down into the palm of her little hand where the ladybird was resting. ‘I suppose he’s busy cutting off somebody’s legs or arms, or some such butchery.’ And the lad with all his staring could not for the life of him tell whether or not her mind was calmly given to investigation of the peculiarities of that abominable insect picked up at so inopportune a moment.

Then, ere he had made another step in his investigation of a much prettier and more interesting creature’s mysterious ways, the object of his study was on her feet uttering a speech which woke up all the boy in him and banished all psychological interest for the moment.

‘Tom,’ she said, with a charming gay frankness, ‘do you remember the race you and I ran to-day a year ago? Dr. Erskine was chosen by you as umpire, you know.

Come on now and let us have another as long as nobody is watching us.'

'Amen, so let it be. Why, what a brick you are, Christine!' the lad responded with a chuckle of delight, springing to his feet with all imaginable alacrity.

Little did his worthy mother, placidly interchanging bits of gossip with the doctor's lady as the couple sat squatted on the grass watching over the empty hampers scattered around, imagine to what height the youth could carry his audacity.

Undertaking to choose a proper spot for their race, Tom marched off the young lady, submitting with the best grace in the world to a rebuke administered with a comic air of solemnity.

'You ought always to respect your elders, Tom Drew—I call you Tom because you are a mere child, you know, and I might almost be your mother.'

'I wish you were,' interposed the rogue, with so droll a side-glance that Miss Brownlee

felt the corners of her mouth failing her and had difficulty in resuming.

‘But you ought not to call me Christine, much less a brick. If I *do* romp with you it is because I know exercise is good for you after so much sedentary college life.’

‘Shut up,’ said Tom gaily, as the lecture had reached this point. ‘Here’s a splendid level place for us.’

Then they went into an animated discussion as to the length of the run, &c., and were soon to be seen speeding like a couple of race-horses over a field, startling half a dozen cows which had been peacefully browsing before their advent in their midst.

Tom was gallant enough to let the lady win one of the two races they run, then Christine declaring herself out of breath took his arm and they went sauntering up one of the winding paths of which I have spoken, looking out for some of the other members of the party whom she felt bound ‘to

bless with the light of her countenance,' as she gravely told Tom.

They gained the top of the hill-side, but could see nobody there, so she proclaimed it their duty to descend to the rendezvous which had previously been agreed upon, the spot where the two matrons sat enjoying their well-earned rest.

'Here's a romantic path down, Tom, let us take it for a change. It's a little steep, but that is nothing to sure-footed people like you and me,' she said, pointing out a shady, apparently little frequented road, leading to the river.

'I'll run you to the foot, if you like, Miss Brownlee—I want one chance more of beating you,' the lad responded, tossing back his curly fair hair from his forehead, and straightening himself for his proposed race, with a new air of determination to conquer, which was quite sufficient to make our ambitious young lady summon forth all her energies. A readiness to throw herself heart and soul into the occupation of the moment,

whatever it might be, from studying some difficult subject in literature or in art, to running races with a light-footed, merry, college lad, was characteristic of energetic Mr. Brownlee's daughter, who had not, as yet, in her serene and sunny existence, found sufficient outlet for the native forces of her temperament ; yet in all she did there was a charm of graceful ability, which saved her from appearing unladylike, even when engaged in some pursuit least becoming to an ordinary young lady.

She looked at her companion's gay, confident face, then at the rather rugged descent, laughed, and set her pretty lips close with a resolute air.

'Done, Tom,' she cried, gathering up the folds of her simple morning dress in one hand ; 'but mind, I run no more races to-day.'

'All right,' responded the lad merrily ; then Christine gave the signal, and they started, laughing in unison at the drollery of their undertaking.

A minute later, Tom, who had got a little

way in advance, was startled by the sound of a suppressed scream behind him.

He wheeled about instantly, and perceived to his no little alarm that his fair competitor had fallen, her foot, as he presently found out, having caught in one of the loops of the great knotty roots of pine and fir which intersected the path, some of them cropping dangerously up through the scanty soil.

She had gathered herself up, and was seated on the spot of her accident, when Tom ran up to her. A glance showed him that something was wrong, for her face was pale as death, and betrayed suffering she was proudly seeking to conceal.

‘That sharp rock—my arm—what terrible pain!’ she whispered, fixing agonised eyes on the boy’s concerned countenance, and following the motioning wave of her unhurt right hand, he saw that in falling she had struck her left arm against a jagged bit of rock, lying at the edge of the path.

‘Not broken?’ asked Tom, growing

almost as pale as herself, and devoutly wishing in his heart that he had never seen Avon Glen ; and Christine was courageous enough to force a ghost of a smile, as she noticed the distress of her young cavalier.

‘ I don’t know, I can’t move it—see ! ’ as she spoke, she tried with all her might to uplift the hurt arm dangling helpless at her side, her efforts only resulting in bringing on a sick faintness, such as she had never experienced in her life, blessed with perfect health and exemption from accidents, as, up to this unlucky day, she had been.

‘ You’d better run and call somebody—I feel very queer. Don’t vex yourself, Tom, you have nothing to do with it, poor boy,’ she presently told him in a faint whisper ; and for the last part of her speech, the lad, under whose rough exterior lay a kind heart, blessed her to himself, as he dashed off to seek help.

To our poor Christine, what followed was like a painful, confused dream. Concerned faces, some of which wore looks of ill-

concealed annoyance at the spoiling of the day's enjoyment; perplexed voices, eagerly questioning, suggesting, reprimanding, in a distracting *mêlée*, which made her head ache and her brain whirl worse than ever; terrifying kind hands, which would seek to approach that injured arm; all combined to tire and bewilder her. Through all the stupor of her pain, she was conscious of one great longing—to see this crowd of undecided, frightened, helpless beings disperse, and to find herself in the strong and skilful hands of a man who would certainly have proved himself master of the situation,—that unaccounted-for absentee, Dr. Gordon Erskine, in quest of whom, or failing to find him, of their old family medical man, Dr. Grierson, her brother Hugh had been driven off, in hot haste, directly after his discovery of the accident.

The one or the other will act with promptitude and skill, he had said to himself. As for poor Dawson, he has not enough nerve

for surgical work, he will lose his head and bungle, if suddenly summoned to attend her. So when Mrs. Dawson, at the bottom of her heart anxious to seize any opportunity of getting her husband a beginning in a family of such consequence as the banker's, had suggested the wisdom of sending for him at once, urging the improbability of Dr. Erskine's being to be found, and the fact that Dr. Grierson had decided objections to being called from his well-earned retirement, the captain had made but a stammering acknowledgment of her interest, and had pleaded the huffiness of the profession, as a reason for awaiting the advent of their orthodox medical adviser.

'Get the poor girl home as soon as possible—that is the very best thing you can do for her,' he had added, with a hasty apology for the trouble they were causing. And with as good a grace as she could muster, the doctor's lady made her arrangements for carrying out his request.

She herself accompanied Christine in the close carriage they had managed to secure at the nearest village inn, and paid that very pale, but determinedly heroic sufferer no end of compliments on her powers of endurance—politic Mrs. Dawson dealt largely in compliments.

‘None of my girls would have strength of mind to keep so quiet,’ she told her, and then the young lady actually smiled in the midst of her anguished pain—for, I may as well say at once, her arm was veritably broken—and made a graceful retort, ‘None of your girls would have been guilty of such a piece of folly as I have to reproach myself with, my dear Mrs. Dawson.’ There was no doubt whatever that Miss Brownlee, along with her beauty and accomplishments, was possessed of an iron will, which it would be hard to mould into compliance with parental wishes, supposing she and the authors of her being should ever come into collision on any matter of consequence, matrimonial or other-

wise—perhaps, after all, the good lady told herself, it was better to be the mother of mere ordinary, moderately good-looking, biddable girls, who were not above crying out loudly when they were hurt, and would certainly never dream of *getting* hurt in any but an orthodox ladylike cause.

‘I never was so sorry in all my life as I am to-day, for having spoiled your pleasant pic-nic, so please make my excuses to everybody—I shall run no more races with Tom Drew, or anybody else, you may be sure of that,’ were the last words Mrs. Dawson heard from the pale, but persistently smiling, lips of the young lady, when she deposited her at her own hall-door, and gave her in charge to her greatly alarmed father and mother, already apprised by Hugh of the unlucky occurrence.

‘Thank God, I’m home at last!’ was the sufferer’s next remark, breathed with a long-drawn sigh of undisguisable exhaustion, when Mrs. Dawson had stepped into the carriage

again, and the hall-door was shut upon the outer world, the medical portion of it excepted.

'My poor, poor child!' Mrs. Brownlee said, with a burst of tears, as she regarded the pretty, colourless face with its set look of pain, and the helpless arm supported in a hastily constructed sling, improvised out of gentlemen's handkerchiefs.

'I can't understand how you could be such a confounded fool,' her father muttered between his teeth, 'suppose you've spoiled the appearance of your arm for ever;' and an expression yet stronger than 'confounded,' escaped the lips of Christine's usually urbane and fond parent.

'Luckily, appearance is not everything, papa,' our heroine remarked, with just a suspicion of a shake in her voice, as she stooped to kiss her sobbing mother, sitting on one of the chairs in the hall, staring at her in a helpless fashion.

'Appearance is just *about* everything—to

a girl like you,' retorted the gentleman, an irate frown darkening his countenance.

'Over twenty-three years old and in duty bound to be thinking of making a fairly brilliant marriage,' was his mental addition to this not very comforting speech; and Christine had a shrewd perception of his meaning.

'What a Job's comforter you are, papa,' she said, with a shrug of her shoulders and a very cynical little smile. Then further disputation was prevented by Hugh rushing in pale and weary-looking, to report that neither Dr. Grierson nor Dr. Erskine was to be had that day nor till late on the next, as they had gone off in company to hold a consultation over some critical surgical case in a distant part of the country.

'Which explains his absence from the pic-nic,' remarked Hugh to his sister, whom he had previously perceived to be a little sore on account of his supposed negligence in availing himself of the chance of a number of hours in her company. Hugh bore the young

doctor all imaginable goodwill, and had not the slightest objection to accepting him as a brother-in-law if Christine's fancy lay in that direction.

'The devil take him and that confounded pic-nic!' burst out his father in a fit of uncontrollable ill-temper, which struck the gentle-hearted soldier as disgustingly inopportune. He made an indignant retort, which only served to provoke a yet more unreasonable outburst, then busied himself with cares for Christine and attempted to soothe his still weeping mother, both of whom he got out of the presence of the angry master of the house.

Safe within their own room Christine and he held an anxious consultation over what was now to be done. That her arm was broken there was no doubt: then it ought to be attended to without delay, Would she trust Dr. Dawson or wait until more renowned medical advice could be procured? Hugh was ready to telegraph to the capital, to

Drs. Grierson and Erskine, anywhere they could think of as likely to send prompt aid.

As they deliberated, a good deal distracted by Mrs. Brownlee's helpless lamentations, Mr. Brownlee came in, looking a good deal ashamed of his previous roughness, and so unmistakably harassed by anxiety for Christine, that she forgot her own resentment, and felt inclined to let him adopt any resolution he found comforting.

'Get Dawson up instantly before the arm swells any more—the longer you wait, the worse the job will be—and, good God! what a pity it would be to see your beautiful arm misshapen!' he exclaimed, when they had explained their ideas of what must be done next; and the fervour of his tone had resulted in reconciling the sufferer to trust herself in the hands of this worthy gentleman, until, at least, Dr. Erskine should have returned.

And thus it came about that to the genuine delight of Mrs. Dawson and somewhat to the perturbation of the doctor, who

would have greatly preferred to make his *début* in Mr. Brownlee's household on an occasion of less exciting importance, the banker's young groom arrived breathless at their door begging for the immediate presence of the doctor at Woodend.

CHAPTER VI.

DR. AND MRS. DAWSON.

‘WELL, papa, was it a bad case? How did you leave her, poor thing?—I’ve been wearying to hear all about it,’ was the greeting with which Mrs. Dawson met her husband at the hall-door, as looking tired and rather out of temper he returned to his home, a smart little modern villa standing in a line with a number of others on Grange Road, a dusty but genteel offshoot from the venerable old burgh which had consisted solely of the long and straggling High Street and a network of dirty and evil-smelling closes and narrow lanes in the rear.

Dr. Dawson hung up his hat on its accustomed peg and wiped his heated forehead energetically before he vouchsafed to speak ;

then he turned round on his waiting better-half with a most irrelevant and disappointing query.

'Is dinner nearly ready? I do hope it is, for I've need of it, I can tell you,' and as was his wont when out of spirits and inclined to be quarrelsome he elongated his naturally long, lank, sallow countenance in a yawn of portentous dimensions.

'A hungry man is an angry man,' said Mrs. Dawson inwardly ; then diplomatically concealing her chagrin at this uncourteous ignoring of her eagerly-put questions, she retired to the kitchen to hurry the cook's preparations, already filling the house with savoury odours.

The doctor loved his comforts, and Mrs. Dawson, everybody admitted, was the cleverest and most painstaking housewife genteel Langtoun could boast. A perfectly cooked, invitingly served little dinner for two—(the young people of the house dined early and on plainer fare)—enjoyed in his

cool quiet dining-room gradually restored him to a pacific and conjugally communicative frame of mind, and the wise lady was rewarded for her patience by a detailed account of his afternoon's doings.

'The setting of an arm in the state I found Miss Brownlee's was no joke, I assure you,' remarked the doctor, after he had described the case for his wife's benefit ; then as he critically sipped away at some old port sent in by a wealthy patient with a warm panegyric on its virtues, he added a few words which put her in an inward trepidation : 'the fact is, my hand is out of practice at that sort of work ; much of it would completely ruin my nervous system, which is in a very shaky state already, thanks to five-and-thirty years' drudgery in a thankless hole like this and the worry of a family of ten children always needing something or other,' and the gentleman's glance fell reproachfully on his helpmeet's anxious, thin-featured countenance.

'I hope to goodness the bones went all rightly together—old Grierson and that provoking interloper Erskine would be as pleased as Punch if they didn't, that's one thing sure,' commented she, stealing a searching look at him while his eyes were gloomily fixed on his glass which he was holding up to the light.

The worthy doctor had said pretty much the same thing to himself several times already, but that was the very reverse of a reason why he should not fire up when the wife of his bosom put the ugly notion into so many plain words.

'You seem to think I'm a broken-down idiot not even fit to set a girl's broken arm. If I'm in that state you and the children may shake in your shoes, for we'll all be in the poor-house in a year or two—that's our look-out;' and the irritated son of Æsculapius poured himself out another glass of port with a hand which shook with indignation.

Decidedly he was not a pleasant-tempered consort when safe in the security of his family circle, in public he was nearly always a bland and courteous gentleman.

‘Dear me!’ remonstrated the long-suffering lady, at last allowing a shadow of ill-humour to darken her own look, ‘I never saw such a man for looking at the black side of everything. Suppose your nerves are out of order, as you say yourself, and you don’t care about undertaking surgical cases, that needn’t interfere with your purely medical practice, which you know very well is a well-paying one. And then there’s Jim—he’ll be through his college course and ready to help you in three years more,’ she added, in as conciliatory a tone as she could get her voice to assume.

But the doctor had not half exhausted his wrath at the world in general and its only present representative in particular.

He emitted a short and scornful laugh at the very idea of his rather slow, extremely

foppish first-born ever becoming of use to anybody, cracked a walnut with a vigour which was entirely unnecessary, and ejaculated a remark which sent Mrs. Dawson from the room in horror and dignified protest becoming the mother of ten innocent children. 'Don't talk to me of Jim. The boy is a downright blockhead and may go to the devil when he pleases—I want none of his 'prentice work here.'

'I do believe he's bungled that tiresome girl's arm, and suspects it when it's too late,' Mrs. Dawson said to herself, as she betook herself to her next duty, the presiding over the tea-table, where the young people were assembled in the little every-day parlour at the back of the house.

'Carry papa his cup very carefully now, Louisa, and try to coax him into the drawing-room, to have some music by-and-by: he's very tired and upset, poor man!' she presently said to his favourite little daughter, whom she had summoned to her side, and

there fell a decided shadow on the youthful countenances—the ten were wonderfully expert readers of the often-varying state of the paternal barometer, and were seldom to be deceived by their worthy mother's endeavours to keep up smooth appearances before them.

As for the doctor, he sat alone in the dining-room, mentally and occasionally half-audibly, giving into the charge, to which he had already consigned his inoffending son Jim, the whole Brownlee family, his own model wife, himself, old Grierson and young Erskine, the port, damned as heady, the tea, as cold. When he went into the drawing-room, things were little better, the girls were accused of playing out of time, the boys of being noisy, his wife of spoiling the whole evening by her sulky airs, though, to do her justice, she showed the patience of an angel, or of that equally unprovokable character, a politic house-mother.

The secret of all his irascibility, as the

reader will guess, was a haunting recurrence of one horrible notion—the possibility of his having committed the unpardonable sin of bungling the setting of an arm belonging to one of the most influential families in genteel Langtoun.

Meanwhile, within the banker's household, the dove of peace had alighted once more. The arm was set : Christine made no outcry of pain, but behaved like a veritable heroine. The dinner could be eaten in tolerable comfort, even though her absence from her wonted seat caused a great blank at the table. And so, sustained by hope that the worst was over, the family got through the evening in a very passable manner.

‘ You don’t suffer any more, my darling ? ’ Mr. Brownlee asked, in his tenderest voice, when he slipped into her room to bid her good-night, and, catching Hugh’s anxious glance (he had come in for the same purpose), Christine set her lips tight, and uttered

a firm negative, which I must own was a most deliberate falsehood.

‘I’ll be all right to-morrow—never fear. Only mind, I shan’t promise to run another race in a hurry,’ she added, forcing herself to make this little jest for their comfort, and thus Queen Christine dismissed her duped subjects to bed, without a suspicion that for her the night was to be a weary succession of sleepless hours, passed in feverish pain, and longing for the coming of the light which would surely bring to her some alleviation.

The morning came, and with it Dr. Dawson, polite, nervous, undecided as before.

Christine told him frankly that she still suffered great pain in her arm, and suggested that he should make a thorough examination of it—he pooh-poohed her complaints, assured her that time would put all right, prescribed a soothing draught and quiet, and went away, leaving the patient in a very mutinous and unbelieving frame of mind.

‘Whenever Dr. Erskine comes home I

must have him examine my arm, papa,' she told her father determinedly, greatly to his annoyance, as he fancied her merely fidgetty over the necessity of remaining dully shut up within her room.

'Now that the arm is set, there is nothing for it but to wait patiently—neither Dr. Erskine nor any other man can mend a broken limb in a day,' was his testy response, 'you have made your own bed and now you must lie upon it, Christine,'—which last vulgar quotation proved a great deal of suppressed irritation on the part of the speaker, who, for a self-made man, was wonderfully free from faults of diction, having, with undaunted perseverance, educated, as well as *made* himself, in a pecuniary sense.

Very much offended, Christine dropped the subject, but only to renew it at a later hour of the day, when she had the satisfaction of hearing, from the paternal lips, a cross permission to 'take her own way, as usual.'

And so, when Dr. Gordon Erskine ar-

rived about midnight at his own door in the High Street, and, scarcely entered, demanded of his cross and sleepy old housekeeper whether any letters had been left for him, he got a little note put into his hand, which very effectually disposed of his chances of sleep, already threatened by the over-fatigue and mental strain of the last couple of days.

‘Dear Dr. Erskine,’ wrote Christine with telegraphic abruptness, prompted by extreme pain, ‘I have broken my arm, and I feel sure that Dr. Dawson, who set it in your absence, has not done it properly. I suffer horrible pain. Will you come up early to-morrow and see what you can do for your very sincere friend

CHRISTINE BROWNLEE.

Then came a characteristic P.S., which served to rouse a fervent admiration of her thoughtfulness for others. ‘Say nothing to papa or any of the rest until you have spoken

with me—they are all quite comfortable in the belief that the arm has been rightly set.'

It was very still and dreary in our doctor's little library at that midnight hour. Old Kirsty had put a supper tray on the table, lighted a pair of candles on the mantel-shelf, brought him the slate with the addresses of people who had sent for him in his absence, and with a rather sulky 'Good-night, Doctor,' had gone off to enjoy her slumbers, already too long delayed through the need of waiting up for the arrival of that uncanny modern invention, the express train. Not a sound was to be heard indoors, and the solitariness of the big, old-fashioned house, which had seen so many generations of inhabitants, young and old, grave and merry, weighed on the young man's spirits, as he sat meditatively at the table, Christine's note still in his hands, and the untouched supper before him. Outside, a thunder-storm was brewing. Occasional gusts of wind set the window-frames rattling, and moaned

eerily in the chimney, pattering raindrops beat upon the panes, the few glimmering lamps along the street served but to show the extreme darkness of the night, for not a passing footstep sounded on the pavement.

The doctor was used enough to such solitary midnight watches over his books and manuscripts, yet this night he felt strangely oppressed and saddened by his surroundings.

How long was his life to run on thus dully, in this silent old house? How long was he to crush down his natural longings for the almost universal human joys of woman's love and sweet companionship, the sight of little children who called him father clustered round his now dreary hearth—his man's birthright, which he had been tempted to sell for a mess of pottage, the liberty to grapple undisturbedly with the stern problems of scientific research?

His glance fell on Christine's signature, that matter-of-course 'Your very sincere friend,' and in his moody frame of mind it seemed fraught with discouraging meaning.

'His friend,' why, of course, she was nothing else—she, in all probability, never meant to be anything else to him—and, alas! she must be more or nothing if his life was not to be one long deprivation of healthful happiness; his heart had already gone out to her in that hungering love a man of mature years knows but once, unless indeed such a man is blessed with a comfortably volatile temperament, which certainly our doctor was not.

Yet women were puzzling beings. It was possible that Christine cared for him—not as he cared for her; that could never be; but as women do care for their lovers in a gentle and passionless way.

There were no doubt exceptional women good and bad who could love with all their heart and soul, but in thinking of himself as the object of such a passion the young man, in whom there was little comforting vanity, if abundant sturdy pride, was slow to place fair 'Queen Christine' in such a category.

Such love as she could give would con-

tent him if only it were forthcoming! He must make her speak out honestly, however his cowardly heart shrank from the confronting of the possibility of a repulse which would once and for ever extinguish the hopes of happiness that had, except at rare intervals, supported him so consolingly during all the monotonous drudgery of the last year; no longer must he be led astray by a vain will-o'-the-wisp.

Only of course his serious wooing must be let stand aside for a little—he was going to Mr. Brownlee's house simply in his medical capacity on the morrow, and he would take no unfair advantage of his position. By-and-by, if Christine chose to promise herself to him, he would, such a painful need arising, take the open field against her father or any other adverse power unwise enough to oppose his just right to carry her off as his wife.

The young man's strong hand clenched involuntarily, then, grimly amused at his own unconscious action, he woke up out of his

meditative mood, ate a hurried mouthful or two, drank off a tumbler of Bass, and, vastly to the displeased wonderment of old Kirsty whose ears were not closed in slumber, he went out of the house, his latch-key in his pocket.

Where he went the manly reader who has been in love will readily guess! To Woodend, reached after half an hour's battling against the wind and rain, groping in the darkness, splashing through the puddles, and reached, after all, only that he might stare at it in a half wistful, half self-satiric way—for a keen appreciation of the ridiculous was one of the militant forces against which love had to war in Dr. Erskine's bosom.

The rain beat in his face, the wind roared through the trees clustered about the lawn, the house stood up, a great, dark pile of uncertain shape and size, a watch-dog, roused by the sound of his footsteps on the gravelled approach, barked furiously, rattling its chain as it made a rush out from its kennel, whose

situation, fortunately for himself, the cause of this disturbance knew very well to be at a safe distance from him.

There was nothing for it but to beat a hasty retreat, since apparently every light was out, and the household were sunk in slumber. He had come thither with a half-formed notion of reaching suffering Christine even at that preposterously late hour—sometimes the Brownlee family were up and stirring long after orthodox hours, and the sight of one or two illuminated windows would have given him courage to ring the hall-door bell and proffer his services.

Yet our hero did himself a great deal of good by this midnight trudge through the stormy darkness. The physical wrestle with the angry elements served to exhilarate his animal spirits, depressed by his long railway journey and previous over-work. He re-entered his silent little library with a hopeful step and a glow of manful vigour on his face, and when a special pet of his, a great coal

black cat, sprang up from the hearth-rug to welcome him home with much loud purring and rubbing against his knees, he actually indulged in a smile of genial sunniness, and as he passed his hand caressingly over the creature's sleek coat, and looked into its unfathomably cunning green eyes, he muttered a succession of odd little speeches by no means of a despondent character.

Beelzebub, such was the name the doctor had christened his pet, had been picked up in his student days in Paris, and ever since he had followed his fortunes, and, so far as lay within the capacity of cat-nature, shared his enjoyments.

Much was the learned and philosophic talk to which *Beelzebub* had listened, or neglected to listen, in his day, many were the varieties of monologues—grave, gay, satiric, pathetic—his master had uttered in confidential tête-à-tête moments, when solitude was felt oppressive, and no more congenial company was to be had ; and faithful was the

return of affection and trust made by the doctor's *familiar*, which was the cognomen Miss Brownlee had laughingly given to him in the course of the one call with which, under her brother Hugh's escort, she had ventured to bless the dull bachelor abode, a sight of the wonderful cat being made the excuse for this highly-enjoyed little visit.

So on this night of which I speak, Beelzebub served very well as a recipient of some of the doctor's thoughts.

'Faint heart never won fair lady, d'ye know that, old Beelzebub?' with a cheerful nod into the cat's face, now on a level with his own, for Puss had seated itself on the table beside the supper tray, which, in the doctor's absence, he had rifled to his satisfaction.

'Poor little woman! I wish we had her out of her pain, eh, poor fellow?' with a sigh which displaced Beelzebub's magnificent whiskers, and made him draw back a few inches in displeased dignity.

'She'd brighten up our dull old lives for us, if we had her, wouldn't she now, my wise familiar?' and a radiance that might have startled a less stolid companion than sleek Beelzebub, who sat meditatively licking a heavy black paw, lighted up the young man's handsome dark face into positive beauty; nor did it disappear during the next quarter of an hour, in which, speaking no more to his familiar, he sat staring into space, his head on his hand.

Which fair and joyous reverie concluded, he bade Beelzebub a cheerful good-night, lifted one of the candles, and went upstairs to bed, treading as lightly as possible so as not to disturb Kirsty, the housekeeper of whom I have spoken, a decent but very cross old widow, whom he had put in charge of his *ménage*, when puzzled to know how else to help her.

The back lanes of Langtoun could have told many another touching story of our young doctor's carefully concealed charities, if

their damp and dingy stones had been endowed with the often misplaced gift of speech. Yet enough of such tales had reached Christine Brownlee's ears to give her a peculiar interest in the man who, with the generality of Langtoun folks, passed as a self-concentrated and gloomy-tempered character, whose acknowledged ability in his profession was his chief claim to their respect.

CHAPTER VII.

A BRAVE WOMAN.

A HOUSEMAID was washing down the flight of steps at the Woodend hall-door ; brooms and pails encumbered the vestibule when Dr. Erskine arrived there next morning ; but his fears of having come too early were presently dissipated by the information that Miss Brownlee was up, and had desired that he should be admitted to her dressing-room whenever he came.

Thither he was accordingly conducted, on his way up the staircase encountering Captain Brownlee, who had heard his voice in the hall, and now took him in charge, giving him a hurried account of the accident.

‘ I begin to think that rascal has left some bone unset or something of the sort—I sup-

pose it takes a lot of bones to make up an arm,' whispered the soldier as they neared Christine's door; and this exceedingly hazy and unprofessional view of the case under consideration almost made the doctor smile, even in the midst of his concern for the sufferer.

Faithful to her wishes, he made light of this fear, and muttered some consolatory remark of vague import—in his heart he felt pretty certain that Christine had some good cause for her complaints; several times ere this instances of Dr. Dawson's surgical inability had come under his notice.

'Come in,' cried the musical voice he knew too well for his peace, when Hugh tapped at the dressing-room door; and his sharp, well-trained ear detected a ring of pain even in the utterance of this couple of words.

Christine was sitting on a little couch where the morning light chanced to fall full upon her. Carelessly dressed in her whit

cambric morning-robe, her bronze-tinted brown hair arranged more loosely than was its wont, her pretty colour gone, and her unnaturally bright eyes looking out of a very pallid face, marked by tell-tale lines of pain, her whole appearance made an appeal to the tenderest feelings of the young man's heart in a way which her healthful and radiant beauty had never yet done.

'I am grieved to see you look so ill,' he said, as she rose to give him her hand; and the poor girl, whose nerves had been severely tried by the constant suffering of the last couple of days, had great difficulty in refraining from bursting into tears, albeit she greatly despised such womanish weakness.

He guessed as much, seeing the momentary quiver of her lips, the haste with which she lowered her eyes, at first raised to his face with the eager mute appeal of a helpless creature in keen pain; and she might have spared herself the effort of responding with a jest and a forced smile.

‘I need not tell you that I am *really* glad to see you this time, Dr. Erskine.’

‘Sit down, and let me see the arm,’ said the doctor, with a grave abruptness which was comforting to the sufferer, at the bottom of his heart occupied with one absorbing longing to find some alleviation of her physical pain.

She drew a deep breath as of relief in the prospect of help, cast a hesitating look at her brother, standing aside, his kind face clouded by distress for her, then addressed him with a peremptory air.

‘Be off, my dear Hugh,’ she said; ‘you upset me with your melancholy looks, and I need all my resolution to stand the handling of this—arm.’

‘I came very near to swearing just now, doctor,’ she added, with a shrug and one of her old bravado glances.

‘Go now, there’s a kind fellow, and send Janet in instead,’ she repeated, as Hugh still lingered, leaning over the back of her chair in a fond way.

'I don't understand how he ever found it in his heart to fire at an Ashantee, Dr. Erskine; he's got so many soft spots there,' was the next remark, uttered with would-be levity, as Hugh stooped down and kissed her pallid cheek; and then the doctor, out of patience with this needless loss of time, came to her support with the force of his professional authority.

'Keep out of the way a little, Captain Brownlee,' he said; 'and send in the woman, in case she's wanted.'

Thus ordered, Hugh left the room, feeling in his honest heart, which had never failed him in an hour of personal danger or suffering, a womanish shrinking from the prospect of seeing pretty Christine's inevitable agony.

'Heigho!' sighed the young lady ruefully; 'I wish Tom Drew had stayed away from that awful pic-nic. I've been living in a sort of nightmare dream for two days and nights, and I expect you are going to hurt

me more than ever ;' and she upturned appealing eyes to the doctor, busy in undoing the bandaged limb with an air of profound absorption in his work.

' Confound Tom Drew !' was all the response he vouchsafed ; but there was nevertheless a comforting heartiness in his cross tone.

' It is good to have somebody swear for you on occasions of this kind, Dr. Erskine,' she told him with a nervous little laugh, meant to cover an involuntary moan which had escaped her and sent a sympathetic pang to his heart.

Then Janet, the head housemaid, came in, a wise and staid individual, whom at a glance the doctor pronounced to be a fit coadjutor.

' Come here and help me a bit ; I'll tell you what to do.'

' Sit still, and be as quiet as you can. I'll not hurt you more than I can help, and it will be over in a minute.'

So he addressed the two women, and, to do them justice, I must admit that they did their best to obey him. Yet Christine's wide-opened anguished eyes, unconsciously kept fixed on his face as his fingers passed over the injured arm with a skilful but relentless search for the cause of such unaccountably excruciating pain as she complained of, were felt by him as a torturing power he had never yet experienced in the course of his professional career. He had another source of distress, too, and a more reasonable one; he had discovered an unset bone which had escaped nervous Dr. Dawson's awkward grasp; and he saw that the poor girl would be obliged to undergo once more the whole suffering of the first operation, with the crushing addition of the agony caused by a displacement of the already cementing framework of the arm.

The gravity of his air convinced Christine that her own apprehensions had been well grounded, and as declaring himself satisfied

he restored the bandages, her glance turned from him to Janet with an expression he understood.

‘Thank you, Janet, I don’t need you any longer just at present,’ she said. And shrewdly suspecting that Miss Brownlee wanted to save Dr. Dawson’s reputation from public disgrace, the woman withdrew, happy in the possession of a well-merited word of thanks and commendation from the gentleman. Ere she left the room she caught a phrase which seemed to her of immense significance, and was remembered in the kitchen in after days when the young lady’s doings had become a source of exciting mystification to most of the household.

‘You are a brave woman, *Christine*.’ So Dr. Erskine had said, with a heavy-drawn breath of relief as he had watched her sink back on the cushions of her easy chair with a quietly uttered ‘Thank you, Dr. Erskine,’ and a glance, which she tried hard to make a smiling one.

He had no idea that in the excitement of the moment he had addressed her for the first time in his life by her Christian name. So she quickly perceived by a stolen side glance into his face, but Janet did not take absent-mindedness into *her* calculations. 'If they aren't engaged, they're going to be,' she said to herself with a nod as she closed the door, and for the life of her she could not resist lingering a moment or two at the key-hole in the hope of catching some confirmatory evidence.

Our couple stuck to the business in hand, however, and she presently withdrew disappointed.

'What is the matter? Tell me frankly, Dr. Erskine,' Christine asked when they were left alone; but her companion refused to be explicit.

He had made up his mind to take old Grierson into his confidence, and consult with him over the best means of retrieving the mistake which had been made without

unnecessarily injuring its author in the Langtoun estimation. He rose, and took his hat as if to go, hesitatingly regarding the girl.

‘Would you mind letting me bring Dr. Grierson up? Do you suppose your father would have any objection to my doing that?’ he said after a pause, adding, as he saw her glance up at him displeasedly, ‘I should much prefer keeping my opinion to myself in the meantime.’

‘Why not tell it to me?’ exclaimed Christine rather sharply, and once more she felt tears spring to her eyes.

‘Because I want to spare you so far as I can,’ he might truly have answered, but instead he said a few words which she certainly found more comforting.

‘Trust me so far as I have asked you,’ and he held out his hand with a grave smile. ‘You consent, do you not?’

‘Yes,’ responded the girl after an instant’s silent reading of his face, ‘but for mercy’s sake be quick—I know you have some new

tortures in store for me,' and the small hand she laid within his trembled.

'I hope not,' spoke the doctor reassuringly. 'I am planning how to spare you further pain—only trust me and have patience for a little till I come back.'

'We'll put her under chloroform till the job is over,' said he to himself; then Christine, with a sigh, bade him go, and telling her to employ the interval in eating some breakfast, a duty she had neglected that morning, he left her.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Brownlee were yet down stairs, but Hugh, by the doctor's desire, asked and obtained their sanction to Dr. Grierson, who was an old family friend, being brought to see Christine; so, having still declined to enlighten them as to his own views, Dr. Erskine quitted the house, taking his way with lengthy strides in the direction of Grange Road, where his old friend lived.

Miss Nancy, the spinster sister I have previously mentioned, opened the door to

the young man, and shook her head in a grim and discouraging manner when she heard his errand.

‘Come in and see what you can do with him yourself, but I’m mistaken if he’ll rise out of his bed to serve any mortal alive—however, you can try,’ spoke the old lady with a plaintive sigh. Miss Nancy was a short, stout woman, of very plain looks, who stuck firmly to the fashions and prejudices of her youth, and although a good soul in the main, cherished a deplorably obstinate grudge at the faithless world that had, with a few honourable exceptions, veered round to new ways undreamed of in the good old days when she was a blooming young damsel.

In every form under which she recognised her enemy, *novelty*, she unflinchingly gave it battle, and dire was the warfare within the little household when the old doctor, who had a delight in aggravating the worthy companion of his declining years, used to make himself the mouthpiece of startlingly *pronounced*

modern doctrines—social, religious, political—as the fancy took him.

The couple, physically cast in the same mould, were mentally and morally the antipodes of each other. The old doctor was a big-brained, hot-tempered, indolent mortal, with the roughest of exterior and the kindest of hearts. Regularity and orthodoxy of every shape were his abhorrence, and scandalous was his neglect of the troublesome dignity of his profession.

He wore his oldest coats on the wrong occasions, stuck obstinately to favourite comfortable hats, which had long lost an appearance of respectability, was occasionally found in his dressing-gown at dinner-time, and sitting over his *toddy* at the small hours of the night.

Miss Nancy ushered the visitor into a scrupulously tidy little sitting-room, where the breakfast stood ready for the brother and sister to take their places ; then, leaving the door ajar, she crossed the passage and rapped

with a firm hand at the door of the slug-a-bed.

In spite of his annoyance at being forced to lose time, Dr. Erskine could not help being diverted by the colloquy which went on through the closed door.

‘What the devil are you wanting here again, Nancy?’ in the gruffest of irate masculine tones; then, with a sudden change of voice, suggestive of a complete revolution of sentiment, ‘Are you the lass wi’ my breakfast, eh? I’ll get up and open in a jiffy. Wait till I get on a pair o’ trousers.’

Maiden Miss Nancy uttered a warning cough, which saved herself from being confronted by him in alarming *deshabille*, then, with an emphatic declaration that ‘no lass would be permitted to cross that doorway wi’ a breakfast-tray, not if he lay there till midday,’ she proceeded to inform him that Dr. Erskine was in the parlour waiting to see him on pressing business, and he had better dress for going out at once

'Tell him he can go to the devil. Humph. What's business to me? I'll do no more doctoring to save the lives of every man, woman, and child in Langtoun. Can't a man get peace to rest in his own bed, and enjoy one of the best articles that ever appeared in Blackwood, without being pestered by you and him at the dawn of day. D—— you both, and send me in my breakfast before the *haddy's* spoilt,' concluded the wrathful old sybarite. And Dr. Erskine caught himself laughing heartily at this startling union of fierce invective and *gourmand*-like interest in his matutinal Finnan haddock, a delicacy of which he knew him to be particularly fond.

'Dear, dear!' sighed Miss Nancy, in pious horror. 'Man Sandy, I wonder at ye, at your time o' life, too, fairly withoot fear o' God or man.'

And by the good lady's descent to her native vernacular, Dr. Erskine perceived that she was indeed at her wits' end. Determined to try the force of his own elo-

quence, he joined the besieging party, and after being peremptorily ordered to go to the devil several distinct times—an order which he with good-humoured pertinacity refused to take as an insult—he succeeded in effecting an entry, leaving Miss Nancy to retreat to the breakfast-parlour, where her brother gruffly told her he would follow directly.

‘And how are you after your journey, eh, doctor?’ spoke the young man, holding out a friendly hand, which in his not yet subsided irritation the good doctor felt strongly inclined to disregard.

He thought better of it, however (Gordon Erskine was a great favourite of his), and stopped in his toilet labours to give it a mighty grasp of goodwill, his small grey eyes twinkling humorously under his shaggy eyebrows, drawn together in a fictitious frown of terrible blackness.

‘None the better of you, sir, anyhow. You’re a fine fellow to come forcing your way into an honest man’s house before cock-crow.’

'Five minutes after eight, doctor,' responded the other, holding up his watch for confirmation of his statement.

'Humph !' grunted Dr. Grierson ; 'you've put it wrong on purpose. No matter ; it's breakfast-time, and I had to get up. Nancy's got a new lassie in the kitchen'—poor Miss Nancy went through a wonderful succession of new lassies—'and she's sworn a solemn vow that this one'll never be permitted to bring me my breakfast to my bed—a day or two'll mend that, though. Nancy's bark is worse than her bite.'

'Like yours, doctor,' said the young man ; then, thinking it quite time to get the now good-humoured gentleman informed of what was required of him, he gave him a hasty account of Miss Brownlee's case.

Of the accident he had already heard. Miss Nancy, who missed little of the Langtoun gossip, had given him all its details, also informing him that the young lady's brother had come 'in a tearing hurry' to

seek his professional help while he was away from home.

The Brownlees were among his dearest friends, and Christine in particular was an especial favourite. He had fully intended to go over to Woodend to make inquiries whenever breakfast was over; still, for consistency's sake, he felt bound to yield but a seeming reluctant and obligatory assent to Dr. Erskine's eagerly-pressed request for his co-operation.

'Humph!' growled he, giving a vigorous but very unmethodical brushing to his abundant if shaggy crop of curling iron-grey hair; 'if it had been an old woman she might have broken every bone in her body before you'd have come tearing me out of my bed at this unearthly hour, and after a journey like yesterday's, too. It's easy to see that you've an uncommon interest in Miss Christine, eh! you rascal?' and he stopped to regard his companion with a very knowing air. 'I've had my suspicions for a while, young

man,' he went on, with a comical wink and a playful nudge, as Dr. Erskine, looking preternaturally stolid, protested against this inference ; ' you're as deep as your own Beelzebub, and just about as dumb, when your own precious self is concerned. But never you think you can blind an old fellow like me, with nothing to do but help Nancy to mind other folk's business for them ;' and he chuckled in high enjoyment of this notion, which he resolved to air presently for Nancy's aggravation.

' Well, well,' assented the young man diplomatically—he would have agreed to any preposterous statement for the sake of saving the precious time he was inwardly chafing at losing ; ' you've mentioned a reason for showing some interest in her. Here's your coat, now pull it on, and let us be off as soon as we can ; the poor thing's suffered too long already, thanks to that ass Dawson.'

Drs. Dawson and Grierson had been sworn enemies from time immemorial, and

this contemptuous epithet, falling from the lips of one not given to hasty condemnation, gratified the worthy gentleman immensely.

‘If I were old Brownlee I’d have him drummed out of Langtoun in disgrace; and old Brownlee wouldn’t be slow to do it either, if anybody put the notion into his head.’

‘Which you and I aren’t going to do,’ interrupted his friend, dodging him with a coat-sleeve; while, swearing at Dawson and his tailor in the same breath, he frantically plunged a stout short arm into empty space. And this implied rebuke drew down upon his innocent head a new outpouring of the vials of the old doctor’s wrath, which lasted until the plunging arm found its natural habitat, and Miss Nancy’s voice again made itself heard outside the door pathetically lamenting the prospect of ‘cold coffee and a dried-up haddie that was as juicy as a beefsteak when it had been put on the table.’

They were in the parlour presently, and Dr. Erskine, who had till now forgotten that

he had eaten no breakfast, fortified himself against coming work by sharing the brother and sister's meal, his own share of which the old doctor was by no means inclined to forego for the sake of all the broken arms in Christendom, as he coolly told their guest, who was in ill-concealed anxiety to be gone.

Nor when, three quarters of an hour later, he was face to face with Christine in her pretty dressing-room, become as a hateful prison in her eyes, did he abate one tittle of his outward rough indifference.

'You're a nice young lady,' was his greeting, with a big grip of her feverish little hand. 'I wonder you aren't ashamed of yourself, keeping three doctors running at your beck and call, as if you were the only woman in Langtoun.'

'I did not want any of you but Dr. Erskine—you as a friend of course—but that was all; I know you want to rest on your laurels,' was Miss Brownlee's equally uncereimonious response, spoken with a reproachful

glance round at her special medical attendant, who was standing a little aside.

‘I’d better go away again then ; it’s no pleasure coming here to look at another man’s bungled work,’ quoth Dr. Grierson in his gruffest voice ; and Christine knew at last what she had suspected before, that Dr. Dawson had made some terrible blunder, the attempt to retrieve which would be attended by a renewal of her most acute sufferings.

She gave a little gasping sigh, and once more turned to Dr. Erskine as if for reassurance ; but seeing that he kept silent, she nerved herself for the coming trial, saying, in a low voice she vainly tried to render stoical, ‘Then we’d better lose no more time—if the arm has been wrongly set. I suppose you’ve got to break it again and begin at the beginning once more ?’ and her questioning glance moved slowly from Dr. Grierson’s rugged, grim face, to fix itself, with the old trying air of appeal, on Dr. Erskine’s firm, yet troubled, sympathetic one.

modern doctrines—social, religious, political—as the fancy took him.

The couple, physically cast in the same mould, were mentally and morally the antipodes of each other. The old doctor was a big-brained, hot-tempered, indolent mortal, with the roughest of exterior and the kindest of hearts. Regularity and orthodoxy of every shape were his abhorrence, and scandalous was his neglect of the troublesome dignity of his profession.

He wore his oldest coats on the wrong occasions, stuck obstinately to favourite comfortable hats, which had long lost an appearance of respectability, was occasionally found in his dressing-gown at dinner-time, and sitting over his *toddy* at the small hours of the night.

Miss Nancy ushered the visitor into a scrupulously tidy little sitting-room, where the breakfast stood ready for the brother and sister to take their places; then, leaving the door ajar, she crossed the passage and rapped

with a firm hand at the door of the slug-a-bed.

In spite of his annoyance at being forced to lose time, Dr. Erskine could not help being diverted by the colloquy which went on through the closed door.

‘What the devil are you wanting here again, Nancy?’ in the gruffest of irate masculine tones; then, with a sudden change of voice, suggestive of a complete revolution of sentiment, ‘Are you the lass wi’ my breakfast, eh? I’ll get up and open in a jiffy. Wait till I get on a pair o’ trousers.’

Maiden Miss Nancy uttered a warning cough, which saved herself from being confronted by him in alarming *deshabille*, then, with an emphatic declaration that ‘no lass would be permitted to cross that doorway wi’ a breakfast-tray, not if he lay there till midday,’ she proceeded to inform him that Dr. Erskine was in the parlour waiting to see him on pressing business, and he had better dress for going out at once

had a personal experience of that, as yet, very imperfectly comprehended fact.

Perhaps she found some sustaining power in this consciousness of a strange duality existing between her and Gordon Erskine—there beat a veritable woman's heart within that resolute, proudly independent exterior, though, as yet, it did not beat with all the vehemence of passion of which it was capable. Anyhow, she went through her ordeal of physical torture with a nerve which struck the two doctors as supernatural. No louder sound than a suppressed moan escaped her white lips, sternly compressed; no change of posture, unprompted by them, inconvenienced their operations, and only when, through a confused sounding in her ears and whirling of her brain, she heard Dr. Grier-son's voice say, with a tone of triumph, 'There, now—that's a stiff job over,' did she uncloset her eyes and look up with a long-drawn sigh of extreme thankfulness.

A moment after she had fainted quietly

away in her chair. When she came to herself she found that Dr. Erskine was bending over her, a tumbler half filled with wine in his hand. He did not say a word, only smiled, and held it to her lips with a gesture which bade her drink; and looking up into his manly face, strangely pale and tired in its aspect, Christine felt no inclination to be mutinous, but obediently drank every drop of the much-needed cordial.

‘There now,’ proclaimed Dr. Grierson’s gruff voice, and his florid, round face beamed congratulation and goodwill as he softly patted her little hand drooping idly over the elbow of her easy chair, ‘Queen Christine is herself again, and needs you and me no more;’ and his glance travelled from the girl to the young man and rested on him in a long look of kindly pride and affection.

Poor Christine had no energy to spare for speech-making,—she only smiled and said another quiet ‘Thank you,’ which its accompanying glance made very precious to *one* at

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Dr. Grierson uttered a 'loud humph,' blew his nose in a slow and noisy manner, as if to gain a minute for reflection, took out his old-fashioned silver snuff-box, indulged in a couple of meditative pinches, then gave a beckoning nod to his waiting medical friend.

'Shut all the doors, and let nobody else in here,' ordered Miss Brownlee, holding out the unlucky arm with a heroic smile of resolution on her perfectly colourless face. 'Papa and mamma and Hugh are quite capable of rushing in to the rescue if they hear me scream.'

'Tuts,' granted Dr. Grierson, as he felt her pulse, 'you're going to know nothing about it till the job's done—a little chloroform will soon settle you, then there will be no screaming to annoy anybody, and you'll wake up as right as a trivet.'

'Quite so,' assented Dr. Erskine, producing a little phial and preparing to pour some of its contents on a handkerchief; but, to the no little annoyance of the old doctor and to

the equal disappointment of the feeling-hearted young one, Miss Brownlee offered vehement opposition to this proposed course of action, unheeding their assurances that in her case it was quite safe, and that previously to their coming into her room her parents had given their consent to whatever treatment their professional knowledge might suggest as desirable.

‘I have a horror of unconsciousness, I have had it ever since I remember; I will not submit to being made insensible by any means whatever—I don’t care whether it is chloroform or any other you can suggest,’ she said determinedly, rising from her chair and looking very mutinous.

‘You are an obstinate little devil,’ escaped the lips of hasty Dr. Grierson, but he instantly begged her pardon, holding out an apologetic hand, which the young lady, who had heard in her day many such energetic compliments from this odd medical adviser, accepted with philosophical imperturbability of temper.

'We are only seeking to spare you unnecessary pain. My chief reason for bringing Dr. Grierson here was my desire to have his sanction to a treatment I felt sure was perfectly safe. When he who has attended you since you were an infant ——'

'Humph,' growled the old doctor, '*before* that—I brought her into the world, the ungrateful minx,' and he comforted himself with another pinch of snuff, shaking his head rebukingly at the still rebellious patient.

'——Assures you that you need not fear to accept this great alleviation of the pain you are bound to undergo,' continued the young man, also with some temper; 'you are very foolish to persist as you are doing.'

And then Miss Christine, who really had an instinctive terror of these deadening anodynes, had recourse to woman's unanswerable argument, *tears*, and the two men, in all possible haste, agreed to let her have her own way; which bargain concluded, the young lady became her dignified and heroic self

again, and without even a sigh resumed her chair and resigned her arm into their hands.

‘I am the sister of a hero, you must remember,’ she told them with a resolute smile, adding, for Dr. Erskine’s benefit, as she noticed that he had grown decidedly paler than was his wont, and that his mouth was set in a stern self-repression, ‘I will not scream, I give you my word of honour : “*noblesse oblige*,” you know.’

From under the old doctor’s bushy eyebrows there shot forth a keen observant glance, which took in the young couple from head to foot, while, in the same instant, his brain exercised itself in a mental survey ; then, aware that Gordon Erskine was just the very last individual who could be expected to break and reset Christine Brownlee’s arm without suffering a quite unprofessional pang in the doing of it, he generously tried to come to the rescue.

‘Step aside a minute, young man,’ he said, with a significant look into his eyes, turned

inquiringly towards him as he concluded the preparatory work; and Christine, deadly pale, and unable to repress a slight trembling, waited the critical moment.

But Gordon Erskine was not the man to stick at a task he had engaged to perform, and Christine's pleading glance was not needed to strengthen his resolution.

'Excuse me,' he said, forcing a smile, and looking stoical enough to reassure his co-adjutor, 'We'll keep to our previous agreement.'

'All right then, go ahead,' muttered he, inwardly declaring that Langtoun might bless the day he had brought so capable a successor to take up his work there.

'Thank you, Dr. Erskine,' said Christine in a whisper; then the young man, remembering his previous experiences of that morning, indulged himself so far as to make a request which, for a moment or two, Christine found odd—it told her a plain enough story after she had time to think it over.

‘Would you mind keeping your eyes off me till it’s over?—We’ll *go ahead* more easily if you can manage that,’ he said aloud, with a rather husky little laugh, and glance of deprecatory significance into Dr. Grierson’s face.

At the moment he felt as if it would be impossible for him to hurt her, as he was bound to do, if those wide-opened, entreating grey eyes were to make their pitiful dumb appeals to his heart.

‘I promise,’ said the girl in a very low voice; and there came a tinge of rosy colour to her cheeks as she determinedly cast down her eyelids. Tears presently gathered on her sweeping, brown lashes—a novel emotion stirred her heart in a way that was half sweet and half terrifying, as by a flash of revelation she understood how love, with its quick, passionate throbs of sympathy, can agonise and rejoice in the person of *another*, and by her own present pain in *his* pain she

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least of her hearers. Then Janet was called in and the gentlemen took their departure, promising to inform her parents and brother that they might now come in to see her.

‘But not to stay long—mind that, Janet,’ Dr. Erskine reappeared at the door to add, ‘and the arm must be touched as little as possible till I come again.’

‘Yes, sir, I’ll attend to that.’

‘I promise to be as quiet as a mouse till you give me leave to be myself once more,’ spoke the two women in succession. And Janet’s sharp eyes taking in the momentary glance which passed between her young lady and the gentleman, she felt surer than ever that her previous impressions had been correct.

Fierce was the wrath of Mr. Brownlee, and in a quieter way of his son, when they found out to what extent Dr. Dawson’s *bungle* had gone. Dire was the vengeance the former vowed in the first moments of his rage; but Dr. Grierson’s own irritation at his

enemy subsiding in proportion as he found him in universal disgrace, Gordon Erskine succeeded, after some trouble, in obtaining a promise that the story should be kept from the Langtoun world.

‘The man understood that he was only called in because of my absence—he told Miss Brownlee himself that I must take up the case whenever I came home; the quietest way of ending the matter would be for you to send him a note telling him I am in charge now. ‘That is,’ concluded Dr. Erskine, colouring a little in the course of his suggestion addressed to Christine’s father, ‘if you wish me.’

And then Dr. Grierson seized the opportunity of bursting out into an enthusiastic panegyric of his young friend’s ability; and knowing that this gentleman was a thoroughly competent judge of surgical skill, Mr. Brownlee made haste to profess his complete confidence and readiness to act as he had advised, Hugh following up with a simple word or

two which struck Dr. Erskine as much more sincere and heartfelt.

The old doctor clapped the young one on the shoulder in an affectionate congratulatory way, as they parted at the door of his dwelling in the High Street.

'I'm proud of you, Gordon Erskine,' he said with genuine feeling, 'you're every inch the son of your father, and he would have made himself a Europe-wide fame if he had lived long enough. Hark ye, my lad, we must keep a look-out—it will never do to have you rust here in a d—— country town, though a lazy lubber like me found its sphere big enough for my energies, the more shame to me ;' and the sexagenarian heaved a sigh over wasted opportunities and irrevocably lost years of vigour.

'I'll tell you what it is,' he presently resumed, as amazed at this unwontedly long and earnest speech from the *brusque* old man, Gordon Erskine stared at him in silence, 'You must get an assistantship to

one of the first Edinburgh surgeons, with a good prospect of succeeding him, of course ; then, that point reached, you'll go steadily upward in your profession.'

'All right,' responded the other, 'I am keeping a look-out for something of the sort—only——' and he smiled and coloured involuntarily under his companion's searching glance, 'I am in no immediate hurry to leave Langtoun:' which was a very true remark, as the reader will easily believe.

'Humph,' growled Dr. Grierson meditatively, then he added a few words which served Gordon Erskine for meditation during the rest of that day and on many an after occasion.

'You secure an appointment of the kind I was speaking of—to a *big gun*, mind, and then come down on old Brownlee, hot and sharp, and carry off the girl along with you—she'll make you a good wife, I'll answer for that, obstinate little spoiled beauty as she is—she's fond of you, and you'll be able

to break her in; you needn't knit your brows at me, sir, I know what I'm saying, and I'm saying it for your good.'

'Nonsense,' interrupted his hearer, half laughing and half angry, yet he listened sharply as the old doctor resumed, after taking a thoughtful pinch of snuff.

'Meanwhile you give Miss Christine an inkling of what you're meaning; if you don't, her father will have her married to that poor young Urquhart before you know where you are—old Brownlee's hankering after that match, I tell you; and what between pity for the lad who is over head and ears in love with her, and inclination to clutch at the glories of the position of a county lady, and natural desire to please her father and the family, she'll let herself be persuaded into the marriage; then it's all up with you, Gordon Erskine, unless you can wait awhile and take your chance of securing a wealthy widow for a wife——' and here Dr. Grierson drew up, warned by a lightning gleam

emitted from the dark eyes sternly regarding him that he had touched on a dangerous subject.

‘A chance I would scorn,’ said the young man hotly, ‘a woman who marries for anything but love is in my estimation no better than——’ and then he, too, broke off frightened at his own vehemence, and holding out his hand with a sudden clearing of his expression, asked his old friend in a good-humoured, yet firm tone, to let the subject drop once for all.

‘You’re a thin-skinned huffy rascal, and I’ve more than half a mind to come to blows with you in the High Street,’ Dr. Grierson told him with a string of *unprintable* abuse and frowns of alarming blackness: then refusing an invitation to ‘come in and let his rage cool down,’ proffered in the young man’s most imperturbable tone, he gave his hand a hearty good-by grip, and with a nod, in which there was unmis-takeable evidence of friendly feeling, walked

off, pausing as the late object of his wrath was on the point of shutting his house door, to call back to him in a stentorian voice, which made the passers-by turn round in wonder 'A man forewarned is a man fore-armed, Gordon Erskine—you'll do well to think over my words.'

'All right, sir,' responded the young man, laughing, in spite of himself, as he watched the comical little stout figure disappear along the street, roughly jostling the market folks with whom the town was thronged that day. Then he shut the street door, and went in to rest and pass over in mental review the events of the morning, and the plans for his future action suggested by that shrewd, if eccentric adviser, old Dr. Grierson.

Beelzebub presently found him out as he sat absorbed in a brown study in his big chair by the library hearth, and as usual he had a puzzling question or two addressed to him.

'She wouldn't sell herself, the proud little

woman, would she, eh?' To which query Beelzebub, disdaining a reply, his master responded with an energetic 'No, not to save her life, God bless her!' which outburst seemed to do him a world of good, for a moment after he opened one of his medical books and plunged into study with a serene light on his face.

'And we've saved her bonny arm, which that blockhead went near spoiling for life—that's a good morning's work, isn't it, old chum?' was the next utterance Beelzebub was called upon to listen to, and if he had been possessed of the bump of wonder to any marked extent, he might have passed the rest of his existence in marvelling how the perusal of such a treatise as had to all appearance been engaging his master's attention could possibly have suggested a question like that.

And thus ends the chronicle of Miss Brownlee's race with Tom Drew, and its immediate results. It had others which it

will take longer to describe, but for the present I doubt not that my reader has heard enough, and will welcome the termination of a chapter so harrowing to his emotions.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. GRAHAME AND LADY JEAN AT HOME.

‘Your mallet isn’t quite straight—stop a moment, Lady Jean! There now, hit right in the middle, not too hard, though, then you’ll pass your own hoop and croquet Miss Kirkwood’s ball at the same time—you can’t miss.’

So spoke Captain Brownlee, anxiously, yet with the gentle courtesy he was wont to show to all women, and more especially, I must own, to Lady Jean Grahame.

‘She can *always* miss,’ cried Mr. Grahame, with true marital roughness; and then her pretty young ladyship’s fresh musical laugh rang gaily out through the pleasant afternoon air, and she too availed herself of her conjugal license to be rude.

'I very often do when you are my partner, because you are such a cross bear—you make me stupid ; but with Captain Brownlee it is quite a different matter ;' and Captain Brownlee was rewarded for his long suffering by a gracious little smile and nod.

'Hit away, then, and show us what you can do under his guidance,' said Mr. Grahame, in a sceptical tone, which yet was highly good-humoured.

'I shall,' spoke her ladyship with dignified confidence. Then crack went her mallet against her ball, a second silvery peal of laughter disturbing the expectant silence maintained by the little group as she perceived that her stroke had been a side one after all, and that its only effect had been to put her ball within very convenient range of her husband's one, already as a rover doing serious damage.

'Ah ! what a pity !' exclaimed Antoinette Kirkwood's clear youthful voice ; 'don't croquet her any more—we're sure of the game,'

she added pleadingly, trying the effect of one of her beseeching glances on her partner, Mr. Grahame, who, in high delight, was poising his mallet for the administration of a crushing blow to the now flickering hopes of the enemy.

‘Nonsense!’ was all his response; and Lady Jean, recovering from her fit of merriment, with which her partner had not found it in his heart to be annoyed, exclaimed, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders, ‘You don’t know him yet, my dear child—there is no pity in him.’

‘Never mind,’ Captain Brownlee consoled her (as if the provokingly indifferent happy player needed consolation); ‘I’ll be a rover directly; then I’ll come back to you and send you on with a rush.’

‘Oh, I don’t mind a bit; it’s all fun alike whether you win or lose; don’t you think so?’ was her next remark, uttered with blue eyes brimful of sunny content; and fortunately for Hugh Brownlee’s sorely-tempted

veracity—to what would he not have agreed at her instigation, unlucky spell-bound victim of her charms?—the click of meeting balls, the crack of a relentless mallet, and the sight of her own ball speeding with surprising velocity to the remote end of the green, gave rise to yet another outburst of irrepressible hilarity.

‘*Au revoir*, Captain,’ she said, throwing him a bright look over her shoulder as she walked off in graceful and *nonchalant* fashion to take her isolated station by the banished missile.

‘She is quite as pleased as if I had croqueted her up to the goal,’ laughed Mr. Grahame, following her with a glance of which a moment after he was ashamed. Must he, undemonstrative, proud Harry Grahame of Midforrest, be constantly proclaiming how hopelessly entangled he was in the toils of that guileless-looking charmer?

‘My wife has a gift of general incapacity I never saw equalled,’ he added, trying to

look cynical for Hugh Brownlee's benefit—little Antoinette was not likely to laugh at him—if he could but have believed it, no more was the crony of his boyhood, whose heart was as tender and as reverently-inclined as any maiden's in the land, albeit no braver one ever beat within a manly breast.

The two men's eyes met now, and, involuntarily on Mr. Grahame's part, a smiling glance of mutual understanding passed between them.

'I do not grudge you your happiness, though fate has denied me such a priceless boon,' said the one telegraphic beam sent forth from the soldier's dreamily-melancholy dark eyes.

'I care not though you, whom I hold dearer and worthier of confidence than all other men, discover how fond and proud I am of my heart's darling,' owned the other answering ray of intelligence in the quickly-lowered glance of the haughty county gentleman.

Fanciful Antoinette, whose soul lived on fair imaginings at this period of her life, took in the couple of friends with her great beautiful eyes, and made a touching little story, not very far from the truth, out of that chance encounter of looks. She took an innocent delight, too, in the study of fair Lady Jean, so bewitching in her frank gaiety and radiant physical beauty ; in the loveliness of her surroundings—the velvety green lawn, bordered by beds of artistically-contrasted flowers rich in gorgeous colouring, and softly shadowed as the mellow afternoon sunshine glinted through the leaves of the lofty beeches skirting its sides ; the verdant glimpses of park and woodland beyond ; the twitter and chirp of the numberless birds ; the darting hither and thither of busy insect creatures joyous in the sunlight ; the perfumed breath of the fresh west wind on her cheek—there was sweet soul-sustenance in it all to the colour-loving artist-nature which had, until the blessed little hand of Lady Jean Grahame

motioned her into this enchanted fairyland, been pining in the uncongenial, prosaic atmosphere of worthy Mrs. Kirkwood's well-managed and orderly home.

It was only a week ago that Lady Jean had vastly excited that quiet household by appearing like a beneficent fairy at its gates, her carriage half-filled with choice flowers and fruits from the Midforrest greenhouses, herself arrayed in her most winning smiles and friendly graces of manner. She had come to claim acquaintance with Mrs. Kirkwood, of whose energetic charities she had heard with admiration from the lips of her pastor's wife, 'that good active creature, Mrs. Drew.' Her own experience in such matters was, alas! sadly scanty; but she was eager to be of service in any cause approved by these praiseworthy ladies. Mr. Grahame, too, though unfortunately sharing her own inability to take any useful personal share in their benevolent undertakings for the good of Langtoun, would have the greatest plea-

sure in supporting her efforts to be of some service with donations, etc.

So ran the first part of the artful story with which, sitting in demurely graceful state in Mrs. Kirkwood's irreproachable drawing-room, her ingenuous blue eyes ever and anon seeking her much-flattered hostess's with an appeal for assent, she beguiled that grave and generally guarded lady into an enthusiastic readiness to please her by every means within her power.

Then—the foundations of an acquaintanceship thus laid upon the solid rock of a community of charitable and religious interests—Lady Jean asked to see Mrs. Kirkwood's interesting youthful niece, whom Captain Brownlee had introduced to her the day before; listened with sympathy to a recital of the difficulties her aunt was experiencing in forming her character and principles, so tryingly *un-English*; offered with charming amiability to exert her own influence for the young lady's improvement—she herself had

been chiefly brought up abroad, and understood well how sadly unfitted, as a preparation for after-life in Britain, is a long familiarity with the easy Continental ways.

Antoinette came in just as the conversation had reached this point, and her ladyship lost no time in pressing upon her an invitation to pass the morrow at Midforrest, an invitation which, to the girl's great delight, her aunt instantly accepted for her with profuse thanks.

After the amiable visitor was on her feet to go, she paused to ask a parting favour of her dear Mrs. Kirkwood—that she would permit her to send in for the young lady occasionally when she, Lady Jean, found herself free to receive her. She was so much alone in that great house of hers, it would do her a world of good to have the dear child's company; the carriage would land her safely at her aunt's door at quite an early hour in the evening, and so on. Of course Mrs. Kirkwood yielded a smiling assent to such

a condescending petition, and Antoinette was in the third heaven of blissful anticipation.

When Lady Jean had driven off, astonishing Langtoun by having thus honoured with a visit a lady so decidedly below her orthodox visiting level as was the brewer's widow, Antoinette was interrupted in her artistic arranging of the flowers her ladyship had brought to listen to a lecture on ladylike manners and morals as illustrated in the person of Lady Jean Grahame, who had fairly conquered her aunt's heart, and for once at least the girl was found docile and tractable.

And now, here on the croquet-lawn at Midforrest, from which I have been keeping my reader too long away, was Antoinette, drinking in her second deep draught of enjoyment, and securely anticipating many more of the same order—for had not Lady Jean taken her to her heart as it were the very first hour she passed with her? was not Mr. Grahame, of whom she had entertained a foolish fear, almost like a kind elder brother?

and—if we are to analyse her reasons for happiness, a feat our dreaming seventeen-year-old maiden did not attempt on her own account—was it not very agreeable to be thrown into familiar intercourse with that interesting Captain Brownlee, who had chanced to be at Midforrest on both the occasions of her visits?—a coincidence which Mrs. Kirkwood had not failed to remark, although without the slightest displeasure.

The game went on gaily, if with many interruptions, caused by Lady Jean's irrepressible spirits and graceful blunderings.

In her lord's accusation of general incapacity, jestingly launched against her, there was a good deal of truth. With the exception of the specially womanlike talent for cajolery, she could boast no marked ability, and at croquet-playing she was hopelessly stupid.

Fortunately her companions of the male sex were of the cool and unprofessional order of players, betaking themselves to the game only when no more tempting amusement was

to be had, or when it pleased her ladyship to summon them to it. As for Antoinette, she was quite a novice in the art, though she certainly brought to the help of her partner the full force of her small ability.

Mr. Grahame had just proclaimed, with a shout of laughing triumph, that Miss Kirkwood and he had won. His wife and her patient cavalier, who, in a roving capacity, was taking her hoops for her in a masterly manner, which she rewarded with laughing compliments and bright glances, were still shamefully far from the goal, when a servant arrived, and presenting a card, announced that the gentleman who had given it was in the drawing-room.

There came a perceptible cloud over Mr. Grahame's brow as he glanced at the name of the visitor, and bade the servant tell him that her ladyship and himself would be in the drawing-room directly.

'Sir Robert Urquhart, of Westerwood—who is he?' asked Lady Jean, looking on

the contrary extremely bright and interested as she studied the card in her hand. Acquaintances in their own rank were not so plentiful within driving distance that the advent of a new one was to be taken so indifferently as her husband seemed inclined to take it.

And then Mr. Grahame caught her eye, and glanced significantly at Hugh Brownlee, who was standing a step or two aside, idly playing with his mallet. He, too, looked the reverse of pleased, her puzzled ladyship remarked.

‘Come along and see him, Brownlee; he’s a sort of cousin of your mother’s, isn’t he? I always forget relationships,’ Mr. Grahame said, apparently recovering from his momentary ill-humour, but his friend shrugged his shoulders and excused himself.

‘The relationship is of the most shadowy sort—I never could quite make it out. Certainly we are almost strangers to each other, and, the call being made upon her ladyship and you, I’d rather not appear on the scene.’

‘Please yourself,’ rejoined Mr. Grahame, with a good-humoured nod.

‘And amuse Miss Kirkwood till we come back,’ chimed in Lady Jean, speaking over her shoulder as she swept off on her husband’s arm, both her little hands clasped over it in that clinging fashion she loved so well.

The little speech was accompanied by a laughing glance, which gave it a rallying significance Hugh Brownlee comprehended. As for Antoinette, she had not a glimmer of suspicion that anybody, least of all Lady Jean Grahame, was plotting for or against the benefit of the gentleman and herself—she was slow to believe that people looked upon her as other than a child, spite of her assumption of these trained skirts, in which she was beginning to find pleasure, and the glory of these womanly coils of soft dark brown hair that, till the other day, had been condemned to stiff plaits, hanging down her back, and tied with knots of ribbon, the procuring of

which in shades suiting her complexion and attire had been one of the harassing minor cares of Aunt Barbara's existence.'

'Come and feed the swans,' spoke innocent Antoinette, surprising the gentleman in a stolen side-look at her, yet not attaching any significance to that fact. 'I have a couple of biscuits in my pocket for them—see, am I not provident?' and she smilingly produced from that receptacle the articles in question.

'You are a dear little girl,' said Hugh Brownlee in his heart, 'and a most comfortable companion to a stupid dreamer like me.'

Aloud, he said only, 'With all my heart, Miss Kirkwood; and, if you will let me, I'll smoke my cigar at the same time. The swans and you don't object to smoke, do you?'

'Oh no—at least *I* don't—I can't answer for the swans' prejudices,' responded Antoinette, with that arch innocent gaiety she was

beginning to exhibit, much to the astonishment of the friends who had only known her since her transplanting to Southfield soil.

They walked away together, laughing at the little jest, and when, as presently happened, Captain Brownlee's mouth settled into gravity again, and his eyes assumed their habitual abstracted look, seldom absent when he was not engaged in conversation, the girl said not a word to disturb him, but with a serene content in being beside him—as I have said before, she did not analyse her sensations—busied herself quietly with the swans and her own dreamy fancies, shaping fair romances in which the heroine was almost always a being ever so much better and lovelier, in *her* estimation, than her insignificant girlish self. No wonder Captain Brownlee found her a comfortable companion when he was inclined to indulge in one of his musing moods.

Mr. Grahame and Lady Jean, as they walked away from the croquet lawn towards

the house, talked of the visitor they were going to meet.

‘Is he young or old, nice or nasty (alas! Lady Jean would descend to slang occasionally), fast or slow—tell me, Harry, else how in the world am I to know what to say in order to please him?’

So her ladyship opened the ball, in a great hurry of curiosity, which vastly diverted her lord, inclined to loiter and amuse himself with pretty Jenny for a minute or two after the restraint of other people’s observation had been removed.

‘It so happens that there is no need whatever that you should exert yourself to please him, my lady.’

‘Why? my dear lord and master.’

‘Because I don’t want him to *be* pleased.’

The speaker, Mr. Grahame, affirmed this with an air of sincerity, and frowned in a very decided manner, from which two facts his fair lady immediately drew the inference that he was prepared to be jealous of their new visi-

tor, an idea which she found most enlivening, and which sensibly increased her interest and curiosity in this mysterious Sir Robert Urquhart, Bart., of Westerwood.

'Aha, sir!' she said, pulling him suddenly up that she might shake a playful finger at him, and give him the full benefit of a would-be solemn stare, 'I see that you are going to turn out a veritable Bluebeard—with a fair beard,' and she gave a tug to the flourishing hirsute appendage in question, while its owner laughed good-humouredly, and listened to her with mischief in his eyes.

'He is young—that is one thing certain,' proceeded her ladyship as they moved on again. 'Whether he is nice or the reverse, I shall find out in a minute or two.'

'Quite so; characters don't take above that time to read, especially a character as Sir Robert Urquhart's.'

'Satire, Mr. Grahame; this is growing serious. He must be awfully handsome, and nice, and fascinating; and to think you could

have it in your heart to keep me so in the dark as to our having such a blessed neighbour.'

Lady Jean looked really a little hurt by this cruelty, but Mr. Grahame was smiling to himself with a deep and unreadable expression of countenance, and little satisfaction to her curiosity was to be expected out of him.

'To punish you I shall flirt with the young man before your very nose. There, now, you blundering Othello.'

'Better that than behind my back, Jenny.'

It was wonderful how happiness and the pretty constant practice of gay skirmishes with her fair ladyship were sharpening up the wits of that quondam stolid and discontented Harry Grahame, of Midforrest.

'Oh, I mean to *begin* with, of course. After the two of us have made up an acquaintance, we'll flirt behind your back very comfortably. Keep yourself from any fears for our enjoyment, Bluebeard.'

They had reached the close neighbour-

hood of the drawing-room door by the time this was said, and it was quite time to pull up and set their faces and voices to the proper pitch of decorum befitting their dignified position as master and mistress of Midforrest, done with the follies of their honeymoon, and soberly settled down for life.

CHAPTER IX.

SIR ROBERT URQUHART, OF WESTERWOOD.

‘AH!’ said Sir Robert Urquhart, with a keen, swift glance, which took in fair Lady Jean from head to foot, yet was not such as any casual observer could have found offensive. ‘So, after all my wanderings, I come back to find you in *paradise*, Mr. Grahame.’

‘I don’t know about that,’ was Mr. Grahame’s response, uttered rather more gruffly than there seemed any occasion for. ‘Midforrest isn’t exactly *paradise*, though a pleasant enough country home.’

He knew well where his visitor supposed his paradise to lie—the survey of his pretty wife had not been unnoticed; but it suited his present frame of mind to appear provokingly slow of comprehension.

Sir Robert smiled with a deep and unbeguiled air.

‘It is the angels who make paradise, I dare swear. What do you think, Lady Jean?’

‘I don’t know,’ responded that lady, with decidedly a very stupid air, as, introductions over and the ball of conversation set agoing by the gallant hand of the stranger, she sank into a chair and tried to recover from the surprise she had just experienced, thanks to the tantalising tactics of that most provoking husband of hers.

‘Pretty to a bewitching extent, but a fool, as was to be expected,’ was the thought which passed through Sir Robert Urquhart’s mind as he too sat down.

Lady Jean’s *young* man had turned out to be an *old* one, fifty at the very least, so, in the nature of things, unfit to fill that one gap in the otherwise admirable order of affairs at Midforrest—the want of a lively and agreeable male neighbour, whose society would be a pleasant resource upon occasion.

There was Captain Brownlee, of course, and it would not be easy to find a better fellow than he, but he was only at home on leave of absence ; and besides, one could not always be asking the same man to dinner, etc. She was bound to look out a reinforcement, if only for the sake of that odd, teasing Harry, sitting grave as a judge, and a good deal grimmer, listening to their visitor, who with an easy grace of manner had turned round the conversation into a comfortably conventional groove.

‘The once rakish Harry Grahame has sown all his wild oats, according to his present way of thinking, and finds this lovely young wife of his too precious a treasure to be jestingly mentioned, even though you go no farther than to allude to her as a household angel. I didn’t think he was such a simpleton after all his experience of the world,’ Sir Robert was inly meditating.

He was decidedly a very remarkable-looking man, who in his youth must hav

been very handsome, and was so still to an extent quite sufficient to compensate in many women's eyes for the lack of youth. He was tall, of dignified, erect carriage, keen-featured, of swarthy complexion, and with eyes of rare blackness, whose piercing look once met one could not readily forget.

Usually, however, Sir Robert's aspect was that of a politely satirical looker-on at the doings of a world in which he had ceased to take any strong personal interest. 'He was growing old,' he used to declare with a studied frankness meant to cheat people into the belief that he was philosophically indifferent to the approach of the enemy he really dreaded as the bitterest evil under the sun—old age, with its attendant disqualifications for enjoying life, or even holding any prominent place of honour in its roaring vanity fair—the centre to which all this man's aspirations had tended.

Yet he was still in the full vigour of his forces, physical and mental. There was

something deceptive in the outward marks of advancing years which he so bitterly resented ; the deep-worn lines about his mouth and eyes ; the many streaks of grey in the carefully cut moustache and beard, which in younger days had been of raven blackness—in brain, at heart, he was himself still, sneering, sceptical of good, cold in all gentle natural affections, fierce in all ignoble instincts.

He had become rather *blasé*, as was natural after thirty years or so of hard living, guided by no higher aim than the sensual gratification of the moment ; yet, let his greed or his lust be aroused by the bait of some prospective gratification out of the oft-trodden and despised round of his vicious pleasures, he would not be slow to concentrate the terrible force of his now slumbering powers, and make the carrying out of his will his one concern in life.

Meanwhile, after six years' absence from Westerwood—his last proceeding of any con-

sequence there had been the burying of a fair young wife whom he had treated with cruel neglect—he had come home tired of Continental life, and determined to settle into the respectable jog-trot of an elderly country gentleman.

His primary reason for this re-appearance in a neighbourhood old associations had made distasteful to him was, as I may as well inform my reader at once, his anxiety as to the ultimate disposal of the small estate of Boghall, the property of his second cousin, Will Urquhart.

It happened to border with his own place of Westerwood—indeed the lands had originally formed one property, until divided by a progenitor of eccentric views, who had persisted in making his two sons share his lands at his death.

Thus had come into prominent position the Urquharts of Boghall, the younger branch of the family, of whom Will Urquhart was the sole remaining male representative. His

father's sister, the wife of Mr. Brownlee, the Langtoun banker, did not count in the estimation of Sir Robert Urquhart.

According to his views Will Urquhart and himself were reciprocally each other's natural heirs, neither of them having in the meantime wife or child to come in with superior claims on the estates.

Neither Westerwood nor Boghall was entailed; thus, when news of his second cousin's serious illness reached him, Sir Robert, who was growing tired of life abroad, had made up his mind to return to his native Westerwood, and do his best to ingratiate himself with his neighbour and relative.

Ere his arrangements were concluded and he was on the field, his young cousin's illness was over, in the sense of present suffering or danger; but his lungs being affected, and he having had one violent attack of hemorrhage, it was not to be expected that the improvement in his health would last long. At all events Sir Robert meant to

sequence there had been the burial of the young wife whom he had treated with neglect—he had come home to a new mental life, and determined to live a more respectable jog-trot of a gentleman.

His primary reason for living in a neighbourhood so distasteful to him was to form my reader's opinion of the Brownlee family. His ultimate disposition was to show a way of obtaining information by observing and listening to the conversation of the Urquhart family, and to gossip on these subjects.

It had been the special pastime of the Brownlee family of Westbank's household, and must have been the movements and projects better known to the outside world.

It is now told that Miss Brownlee and my unfortunate young cousin are likely to make up a match in spite of his ill health,' Sir Robert said quietly in the course of conversation, after shaking his head gravely over Lady Jean's expression of a hope that the

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A gloomy nod from the gentleman thus
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abide firmly by his post, and watch for any chance of pushing his own interests.

And now, the day being charming, and he with time on his hands, he had ridden over to Midforrest to renew his acquaintance with Mr. Grahame, and make up one with Lady Jean, of whose charms he had already heard. He wished besides to gain indirectly all the information he could respecting the late doings of his cousin and the Brownlee family, and he knew no quieter way of obtaining it than by provoking and listening to a little drawing-room gossip on these subjects. The Grahames were the special patrons of the banker's household, and must know their movements and projects better than most outsiders could.

'I am told that Miss Brownlee and my unfortunate young cousin are likely to make up a match in spite of his ill health,' Sir Robert said quietly in the course of conversation, after shaking his head gravely over Lady Jean's expression of a hope that the

doctors had looked too seriously upon Mr. Urquhart's case.

'I don't believe a word of it,' was Mr. Grahame's brusque response. He seemed determined to be disagreeable that afternoon.

'She is a lovely girl, is she not, Sir Robert?' put in Lady Jean suavely, as she fancied she caught a look of annoyance in the baronet's black eyes, of which in her heart she was a little afraid.

She had scarcely addressed a direct word to him hitherto, and he turned to her now with his most winning smile and tone. Fair ladies were the order of creation of which he most approved, and in their presence he was always ready to exert his pleasing powers.

'I have not seen her since she grew up. When I was last at Westerwood—Mr. Grahame will remember it was on the sad occasion of poor Lady Urquhart's death'——

A gloomy nod from the gentleman thus appealed to confirmed this supposition.

'The young lady,' proceeded Sir Robert, with a becoming melancholy air, as he met innocent Lady Jean's glance of quite unnecessary condolence on this supposed affliction, 'was away at school in Germany. Since I returned I have seen none of the family. I only arrived a couple of days ago, and gave myself the pleasure of calling upon your ladyship and my old friend Mr. Grahame the first leisure hour I had.'

'You are extremely kind, Sir Robert—we are delighted to see you,' Lady Jean hastened to say, casting a side glance of reminder and rebuke to her husband, who, with as good a grace as he could, corroborated this statement, a shockingly false one so far as he was concerned.

'Mr. Brownlee, by the way, has been growing rapidly rich while I have been absent—lucky speculations, people say, have been the making of him ; a very bold speculator he is, too, as I am assured, very bold, indeed,' and Sir Robert, who had been speaking, shook his

head and heaved a sigh, throwing a look of very deep nature at his host.

‘What did he mean?’ that gentleman asked himself; ‘did he wish to prejudice him against his trusted agent, or was he merely fishing for information?’

The latter supposition was the true one. Sir Robert was a man who liked to work understandingly when the furtherance of his own interests engaged his attention. The Brownlee family threatened to come in his way, since Will Urquhart’s possessions were the object of his covetousness, and it was very desirable that he should learn all he could about the circumstances of that family.

‘I do hope he does not speculate rashly,’ Lady Jean remarked, with some alarm, turning to her lord for re-assurance.

That gentleman laughed, though not in a very amiable manner.

‘I think we may safely leave him to manage his own business, Sir Robert,’ he said, with a shrug and a curl of his lips; and Sir

Robert perceived that he need not hope for any assistance of the kind he required being found in that quarter.

So during the remainder of his call, which he sensibly made a short one, he talked innocent conventionalities only, and Lady Jean was spared the annoyance of seeing her husband behave with ungracious brusqueness.

When he had taken his departure, escorted to the hall-door by Mr. Grahame with a species of gloomy compulsory politeness clearly enough understood by its keen-eyed though diplomatically-gracious recipient, Lady Jean breathed a deep sigh, as of relief from a disagreeable sensation, and, sinking restfully back in her lounging chair, mused over this visit, quite a noteworthy event in the quiet life they were then leading.

She was not aware that her husband had re-entered the drawing-room until startled by his voice coming from behind her chair, as he stood over it looking provokingly quizzical.

‘Well, my lady, you’ve had half an hour in Sir Robert Urquhart’s company—ample time to know him thoroughly, according to you. What’s your verdict—“young or old? nice or nasty?” pronounce with your usual decision.’

Lady Jean glanced drolly back at him without raising her head from the back of her chair, as he stooped down over her, affectedly eager for her reply. The position was a favourite one with the happy young couple.

‘Not young or nice, decidedly.’

Another relieved sigh followed this statement; then she laughed, and repeated, after a momentary hesitation caused by a want of words to express her not altogether clear impressions of the stranger—

I do not like thee, Doctor Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell.

There, Harry, that’s all I know about him.’

‘What, you who can read a character in a minute or two?’

Lady Jean, glancing up, perceived that the speaker had put his bearded, sunbrowned, smiling face into suspiciously close proximity to her own ; and suddenly remembering that she had a grievance of no trifling nature, she hastened to bring it forward, and so ward off the threatened kiss, which certainly had not been earned by the previous good conduct of the gentleman.

‘Oh ! by-the-by, Harry,’ she began with a reproachful air, ‘I’ve a crow to pluck with you. Knowing that I am such a shameful ignoramus as to the history of your county people—how could I be anything else, since I never was here in my life till you got hold of me ? how can you cheat me so ?’

‘Oh ! if you knew your “Peerage” properly, like other young ladies politely reared, Sir Robert Urquhart’s age would be no puzzle to you,’ interrupted Mr. Grahame, slipping a preliminary arm round her neck, and sinking his head yet an inch lower.

‘Poor papa and I were a couple of merry

strolling vagabonds, who did not need to trouble ourselves with your "Peerage," sighed Lady Jean, casting a backward mental glance over her girlish days, chiefly spent in the company of a fond but eccentric father, whose unconventionalities and careless upbringing of his only child had estranged most of his relatives from him.

The roving earl was sleeping peacefully under a very simple headstone in the quiet little cemetery of the out-of-the-way French village where he had chanced to die. Tall, burly Harry Grahame, who had delivered her from the bondage of a crushed life among an uncomprehending, stiff-backed English family of scarcely-known relatives, stood, or rather leaned, close beside her, his breath on her cheek; the present joy was not above a few moments in banishing the past loss from her thoughts, and by the time the inevitable embrace was over, she was ready to resume the gay banter this *mal-à-propos* reminiscence had checked.

‘And after all you didn’t flirt before my face, Jenny,’ said Mr. Grahame, rallying, drawing a chair close beside hers, and possessing himself of one of her tiny white hands.

‘And I won’t behind your back, I may safely promise you, Harry,’ rejoined her ladyship, drawing away the imprisoned member with a frown and a shake of her head, and proceeding to smoothe down her hair and straighten out the lace ruffle about her fair throat.

‘I do wish you’d grow indifferent and learn to keep hands off like most husbands, you tiresome fellow,’ she interjected, vouchsafing to him an arch, demurely smiling look which said the very opposite of her words; then she ran on with the story of her impressions.

‘That man frightens me, I must confess. It’s very strange, is it not?’

‘Scarcely strange, considering what a precious coward you are, Lady Jean Grahame.’

‘It *is* strange, though. Wait till I have explained myself—you really seem to be a born contradictor. Ah, by the way’—her ladyship sat up in her chair and looked seriously rebuking—‘I felt quite ashamed of your rude, sulky manners to your visitor. Supposing you don’t like him, that is no reason why you should tell him so by your looks and tones of voice.’

‘I do more than *not* like him, I almost hate him,’ proclaimed the rebuked gentleman with unusual fervour. ‘When he looked you over as I introduced you, I felt strongly inclined to—twist his neck.’

At which admission Lady Jean laughed in great diversion.

‘A cat may look at a king, Bluebeard.’

‘Well, a man may not look at you as he did—not often, anyhow, and not in *my* presence,’ persisted he, in a way between jest and earnest; and as she showed an inclination to be merrily satirical of his grand Turk notions, he proceeded to declare that he had

good reasons for disapproving of Sir Robert Urquhart as an acquaintance.

'Where was I?' questioned Lady Jean, with a thoughtful tap of her forehead, after he had finished his tirade. 'Ah, I remember. Here are *you*, for instance'—her look turned to his expectant face with gravity—'as rough in your ways as a bear, and decidedly very bad-tempered when you don't get your own way; yet I don't have the slightest fear of you, no more than if I knew you to be a lamb in gentleness of disposition.'

Here she stopped to take breath, the first part of her statement over.

'Ah! you'd better wait a little. We're only at the first chapter of our romance yet, my lady,' put in her listener, dropping his eyes and wheeling aside a moment to hide the pleased thrill these words sent to his heart.

Lady Jean nodded with gay confidence.

'Oh, I understand *you* very well. If you were really angry you'd storm like a raging

lion, and I'd quietly keep out of your way till the rage was over, which it would be very soon—you could not possibly do without me any length of time, you know.'

'Indeed!' And he gave her ear a very gentle tug, as a punishment for her presumption.

'Don't!' interjected her ladyship, with a laugh and a frown, 'let me go on with what I have to say. Your first rage over I'd come back to you, and then ——'

'Well, what then, Jenny?'

Once more her laugh rippled pleasantly out through the stillness of the great lofty drawing-room.

'Oh, I'd easily cajole you. A few tears, and a kiss or two at the utmost, would have you at my feet—metaphorically, of course, you're far too much of a stiff-backed Britisher to kneel bodily to any woman in the world. However, never you think that I could not settle *you* very easily, Mr. Harry.'

Mr. Grahame shrugged his broad shoulders

and smiled, not over gaily. He doubted greatly whether the speaker was not over-confident of her bear-leading powers.

‘Don’t joke about such an ugly notion as a quarrel between you and me, Jenny. I’ll never be really angry with you in my life, I hope. You don’t know how the devil gets hold of me sometimes ; used to, anyhow.’

A cloud came over his brow, and for the thousandth time he vowed to crush down that naturally fierce temper of his, whose outbursts, readily roused by any defiance of his will, had caused him more self-disgust than he would have chosen to acknowledge even to his fair confessor, Lady Jean, to whom on rare occasions, when they were alone, and his heart was over-full of love and happiness, he would unbend so far as to whisper vague confessions of remorse for bygone failings, taking vast comfort out of the plenary absolution indulgent Jenny was ever ready to accord.

‘Sir Robert, on the contrary,’ proceeded her ladyship, not noticing his grave abstrac-

tion, 'is very well-bred and graceful in his manners. I don't mean that you are ill-bred, according to British standards'—she paused to admit, with a smile of apology, which roused her companion into cheerfulness, and brought forth an answering smile and a mocking expression of gratitude for the compliment.—'very gallant to women, apparently.'

'Just rather too much so, perhaps, Jenny,' interpolated Mr. Grahame, quizzically elevating his eyebrows and regarding his wife with an expression which convinced her that she had unwittingly hit upon one of the good reasons for shunning Sir Robert's society.

'He is all that I have said,' proceeded she, with a smile and a dropping of her eyelids, 'yet if I were in his power, as his wife, for instance ——'

'Which God forbid,' muttered her listener through his teeth.

'—— I should not dare to disobey the most unreasonable of his orders ; I'd tremble

whenever I saw a frown on his face, and without the least trouble, just by turning his terrible black eyes sharply on me, or doing something of the kind, he'd make of me the most submissive slave that ever breathed.—— Only I'd hate him with all my heart and soul, and be ready to run off with almost anybody who cared to have me, I'd be such a forlorn and miserable wretch,' ended her 'pretty young ladyship, with energy ; and she rose from her chair, telling her startled husband that it was more than time to rejoin their couple of guests.

'By-and-by you must tell me all about this gentleman,' she remarked, as a few minutes later they walked towards the croquet lawn ; ' I can't very well ask Captain Brownlee for information, seeing he is a sort of relation.'

'No, you'd certainly better choose some other subject of conversation with him, Jenny ; Sir Robert Urquhart's life would not, if faithfully told, make a book for general read-

ing,' responded Mr. Grahame, in some alarm, yet he was just enough to add, a moment after, when he saw that this speech had been understood, 'no more would my own, so far as it has gone. I don't mean to begin casting stones at anybody. Don't ask me much more about him, Jenny, I've no good to tell, and so the best thing I can do is to hold my tongue.'

'You're a dear old fellow,' Lady Jean declared, 'and you're growing better and better every day you live—don't laugh, it is quite true—and one thing I'm sure of, your life would be as fit for general reading as most men's, so don't abuse my husband before *me*.'

'It would have one delightful chapter in it anyhow, Jenny—our courtship, which is not over yet. I'd start the story there, and burn up all the previous records. I wish I could.'

'*Somebody* burnt up all the ugly ones long ago, I don't doubt,' whispered Lady Jean; and as he looked up for a moment,

not comprehending her, he saw that her smiling blue eyes had filled with tears.

Their guests were not to be seen, nobody else seemed near, and Harry Grahame drew her to him and kissed her. They were bringing religion home to each other's hearts in a strangely unorthodox way, these two. They did not well know what they were doing yet ; by-and-by, looking back with the sad wise eyes of experience, they could better understand how the spirit of good sprang into being within them.

'After all, we are very near being in paradise, Harry.'

'We *are* there,' declared the man, with a thrill in his deep voice, pressing her closer to him.

Then they moved on, and were presently their wonted selves again.

CHAPTER X.

MR. BROWNLEE'S COGITATIONS.

MR. BROWNLEE, as I have before hinted, was a man of many cares, and what made these anxieties of his the more harassing was his conviction that policy required him to keep the greater part of them securely locked within his own breast.

Thus, very often, when in his office and in his own home he indulged in seemingly unreasonable fits of passion, calculated to rouse dislike and resentment in those upon whose devoted heads they burst, he was but giving vent to feelings of irritation produced by causes of no little gravity—in *his* estimation, at least.

In the course of my story I shall have occasion to detail these causes pretty fully,

meanwhile I shall but give my readers a general idea of them.

To begin with, he had his ambitions, dearer than life to his heart, yet impossible to be realised unless through the co-operation of others who seemed shamefully lukewarm in the cause. Almost unaided he had pushed his own way from penury up to a fairly lofty position in his own small world, and he now felt himself quite justified in requiring of his children that they should continue the upward struggle, supported as they were by advantages the procuring of which had cost him the unslackening efforts of the best years of his life, a sacrifice laid without a murmur upon the altar of his pride.

Where, Mr. Brownlee used to ask himself, could one find a father who had worked harder for the worldly aggrandisement of his offspring? Where one who had bestowed more time and brain labour upon plans for their future?

He had spent thousands upon their educa-

tion, he had taken pride in surrounding them with luxuries, and in sparing them all vulgar pecuniary cares ; they owed it chiefly to him that they were perfectly fitted to remove into a much higher social sphere without being under the disagreeable necessity of materially altering their tastes and habits of life.

His fondly-cherished ideal had been to make Hugh a gentleman and Christine a lady, in the sense in which their mother's relatives understood these words (the influence his marriage into a family of the landed gentry had exercised on the self-made man was of no little strength). So far as he had yet gone he had not failed of success, the most carping critic in the county could not, if he or she liked to be honest, bring forth the ghost of a reason why exception should be taken to these young people's personal claims to be so considered.

Mr. Brownlee's present cares on this score lay in the fact that neither Hugh nor Christine—now most assuredly of an age to

understand fully what were the requirements of their position—seemed ready to take up his hitherto successfully-prosecuted labours with the energy and determination needed to bring them to an honourable completion—their own establishment on a firm and independent footing in the ranks of the fashionable world, or at least of a world quite beyond the sphere with which he had been forced to content himself.

There was his son Hugh, quite sufficiently good-looking, well-bred, blessed with that military prestige which had cost his father so much solid cash, why did not he set his mind to the procuring of a wife with money and position, who would be a veritable helpmeet to him in his further up-hill social progress?

He had taken care to put him into one of the crack cavalry regiments; he had absolutely pressed money upon him all these idle years, when he had had nothing else to do than amuse himself. If he has not spent as freely as the majority of his comrades, the

fault lay in his own over-quiet tastes. Yet, to his father's certain knowledge, he was a favourite with most of his fellow-officers. Some of the best houses in Britain were open to him. What did he mean by his folly in delaying to take advantage of such favouring circumstances? Why, the provoking fellow was now in his thirtieth year, and had positively a grey hair or two plainly visible already. It was clearly high time that he should be establishing himself.

Faithfully had Mr. Brownlee admonished him every now and again, by word or by letter, as Hugh happened to be at home or absent with his regiment, and never had he been able to obtain a more satisfactory reason for his celibacy than the ridiculous one that he had never happened to fall in love with any woman likely to listen favourably to his proposals. When he, Mr. Brownlee senior, after a youth of hard pecuniary struggles, had found himself in a position to marry, other considerations than love ones had influenced

his choice, 'but alas! Hugh was not cast in his own stern mould, and very little selfish pushing of his own interest need be expected out of him,' his father was in moments of despondency wont to declare.

One alleviation of this worry was its being no secret to the rest of the household, and to do them justice Hugh's mother and sister gave him some sympathy on this point, and even abetted him, in a mild way, in his efforts to make the young man listen to reason.

In Christine's case, however, her father felt bound to keep most of his fumings to himself. She was made of a different material from most girls, it seemed to him, and careful, indeed, must be the paternal hand which tried to guide her matrimonial affairs.

Yet very strongly tempted was he to try some stronger measures with her. Here was she, admitted by the voice of public opinion to be one of the loveliest women in the district, and at twenty-three years of age, what

was she doing for herself? Absolutely nothing, but enjoying life like a butterfly at one minute and toiling away at some quite needless study the next. The only study she ought to be concerning herself with at the present stage of her life was, according to her harassed father's way of thinking, the science of feminine fascination, with, of course, the laudable end of a suitable marriage held steadily in view.

As yet a couple of perfectly preposterous offers for her hand were all that had come to Mr. Brownlee's ears. They had been made by an aspiring young lawyer, who had since left Langtoun, and by a yet more presumptuous head clerk of his own, whom he had been within an ace of dismissing on the spot, but who, thanks to Christine's intervention, was still the very convenient scapegoat of his office ill-temperers.

The girl had seemed as amazed as himself when, a couple of years or so ago, these bold wooers had almost at the same time addressed

themselves to her father. She had dismissed them in a very dignified manner, and since then her admirers among the Langtoun young men had discreetly refrained from laying open siege to the citadel of her heart. It had become pretty generally understood that Christine Brownlee was a divinity to be worshipped afar off, unless, indeed, the worshipper could claim some special consideration on account of wealth and position.

Yet certainly her father thought she could have made some effort to improve this state of matters, which, unluckily, seemed to content her sufficiently well.

She had not her brother's right of *entrée* on terms of equality into almost any society. The ungallantry of the world in this respect was one of poor Mr. Brownlee's bitterest unacknowledged grievances. She could not be permitted to take any prominent part in the gaieties of their middle-class neighbours. He had not reared a lovely only daughter at so costly an expense to shine in coteries so

insignificant ; but she had a few old school friends of first-class standing, whom she visited occasionally. One was married in Edinburgh, another in London, and their relations with her continued of a cordial kind. Surely so pretty and clever a young lady, if she had pleased to exert her fascinations, might have ere this time confided to his ears the welcome story of a suitable offer of marriage.

Indeed, Christine did not need to look far from home if she wanted to make a really good establishment of herself in life. There was her cousin Will Urquhart, who needed but a little encouragement to come forward as a suitor, and, considerations of health apart, what objections could be urged to him ?

Of late Mr. Brownlee had come to think that, all things considered, she could take no present step so calculated to promote her own interests and the family glory as the giving herself in marriage to this young gentleman, for whom she professed abundant friendly

regard. Love was quite a superfluity in the banker's estimation, an agreeable luxury to be indulged in without blame by young people who could afford it, which *his* young people could not—for the present, at least. Will Urquhart would make a devoted husband while he lived, and—to look forward a little—Christine's father would never have climbed to so creditably high a rung on the social ladder if he had not habituated himself to looking forward a little—there was no doubt whatever that the well-dowered widow of the well-born squire, William Urquhart of Boghall, was much more likely to make a brilliant marriage than was the daughter of the self-made, business-engrossed, James Brownlee, the country banker. And as for the liberal dowry it was Mr. Brownlee's full intention to bestow upon her, it could be much more conveniently paid down on the occasion of this prospective second marriage than now, when, thanks to strikes and combinations, times were hard, and the keeping

of his many business undertakings afloat required a great command of ready money.

He knew Will Urquhart well enough to be sure that he would raise no stickling objections because of the lack of a dowry—the poor fellow had more money than he knew how to spend, and was not likely to live long to enjoy it, the more reason, as Mr. Brownlee looked upon it, why Christine should make sure of a wife's share. Indeed, if she managed as cleverly as she was quite capable of doing, supposing her notions of honour did not interfere, he would not stop short of bequeathing to her the estate itself, and so would be frustrated the covetous hopes of that plotting Sir Robert Urquhart of Westerwood, the man whom, of all the world, he detested and dreaded the most, especially at this period of his reappearance amongst them.

Yet other weighty cares had Mr. Brownlee, but of those I shall not speak at present. My chapter so far has given you a sum

mary of the thoughts which passed through his brains as one sombre, lowering afternoon, a few weeks after his daughter's accident, he walked home from his office in the High Street.

It was market day in Langtoun, and he had been compelled in his capacity of banker to make himself agreeable to a considerable number of the farmers, whom business brought thither. His head clerk had been absent on account of indisposition, and he had thus been brought in for an unusual amount of worrying work. He had a headache, and lacked an appetite for his dinner, the meal that, eaten in ample leisure after the labours of the day were over, was the only one by which he set much store. All these unpropitious circumstances combined to put him in a quarrelsome mood, and just as he reached his own hall-door his sense of ill-usage reached its climax by the sight of Dr. Erskine, who was on the point of leaving the house, escorted to the threshold by the cause

of much of his late perturbed cogitation—his son Hugh.

There was a very grim exchange of salutations. Dr. Erskine saw at a glance that the old gentleman was in no friendly mood, and he was not the man to make sneaking conciliatory advances. Hugh stared rather aghast at the couple of gloomy countenances ; then the doctor took his departure, and almost before he was off the doorstep Mr. Brownlee shut the door with an unnecessary bang.

‘What does this fellow want coming here so often, eh?’ he demanded of his son, thus preventing the hasty retreat the soldier was wisely anxious to effect. His father, when out of temper, was by no means good company.

Hugh had a shrewd suspicion of what the said ‘fellow’ wanted, but he did not feel bound to proclaim it.

‘I suppose he wants to see me—and the rest of us,’ he responded, with a shrug and a smile.

‘What a horrid close atmosphere we have

this afternoon ! there's thunder in our neighbourhood, surely,' he added, making an effort to be civil, and at the same time to change the subject, which, from one or two hasty words that had on a previous occasion fallen from the paternal lips relative to Dr. Erskine's frequent visits, he knew to be an unsafe one.

'The rest of us,' repeated Mr. Brownlee, in great scorn, 'that's Christine, I suppose. You can't think he comes here on purpose to enjoy your mother's society ?' Which remark was meant as a jeer at that lady, whose company was certainly none of the most entertaining.

Hugh always fired up when his mother was assailed. There was a great deal of indignant rebuke in the tone with which he responded.

'I can't answer for his motives. One thing is certain—he never fails to pay my mother the attention and respect becoming a gentleman.'

'Indeed!' was all Mr. Brownlee's remark ; but as he uttered this couple of syllables his voice shook with anger, and his already frowning face gathered a cloud of additional blackness.

And then Hugh's heart smote him as it flashed upon his mind that his father had understood his hasty speech as a personal insult. He thrust out a frank hand, looked the old man full in the face with a smile which it would have needed a very stern paternal heart altogether to withstand, and said pleadingly, in a low voice,

'Don't quarrel with me, father—I'll not always be at home to torment you, you know, and if you think I answered you too hotly, why I'll beg your pardon with all the good will in the world.'

He never could resist his son when he chose to adopt this strain—at the bottom of his heart he was vastly proud and fond of him. He did not find a word with which to answer him just at the moment, but took the out-

stretched hand and gave it a slight pressure, which pleased Hugh better than anything he was likely to have said.

Then, as chance would have it, Christine passed into the hall, where, with imprudent disregard to the possibility of listeners being within hearing range, the father and son had been engaged in their angry colloquy. She was rather pale, as she had been ever since her accident, but very pretty in her paleness, and with a bright smile of welcome on her face.

'I was sure I heard you come in, papa,' she said, running forward to give him the regular afternoon kiss, and poor Mr. Brownlee felt the last vestige of his just paternal indignation melting away within him. If the young couple had concerted this chance joint attack it could not have been carried out more successfully.

'How is the arm, Chrissy?' he asked, with a rather embarrassed side glance at Hugh as he returned the young lady's kiss.

‘ Oh, first-rate, papa—it doesn’t pain me a bit now ; and, after all, I don’t think a sling is disfiguring—not in *my* case is it, Hugh ? ’ and she wheeled gaily round on her brother, demanding a compliment he was ready enough to bestow.

Christine really looked remarkably interesting and pretty that afternoon in her sweeping mauve silk dinner dress, with a picturesque black lace scarf so arranged as to hide the hurt left arm, a bunch of pansies in her ruddy brown hair, and another nestling amid the soft ruffles of white *tulle* that framed her fair neck and bosom.

‘ Far too good to fling away on a country surgeon,’ her father inwardly declared, beginning to grow wrathful again as he remembered this special grievance. If he had known that it was this said country surgeon’s hand which had, in the course of a little garden promenade along with Hugh and Christine, gathered from one of the Woodend flower-beds these very pansies now adorning

the young lady's hair and bosom, he would not have been slow to speak out in very disagreeable language.

As it was he flung a Parthian shot ere he let the girl go. Hugh watched its effect with considerable interest. 'Queen Christine' was still a good deal of an enigma to him.

'So you've had Dr. Erskine here again?'

'Yes, papa—he went away just before you came in.' And the self-possessed damsel stared innocently into her questioner's face. Inly she was blessing her stars that just at present blushing was not in her line—the shock of her accident, and the subsequent suffering, had very effectually banished her roses.

'A *medical* visit?' with rather a sneering inflection of the voice and a glance of keen scrutiny.

'Not at all—merely a friendly one. I have done with *medical* visits in the meantime, thanks to his skill and attention,' responded Miss Brownlee, with a suspicious

thrill of offended feeling in her voice, and a defiant curl of her pretty, short upper lip; then, ere her father had time to speak again, she had walked off, Hugh obeying a swift glance which enjoined him to follow her, and departing with all speed in the rear of her rustling draperies.

His daughter's tone and look sent a pang of dismay to Mr. Brownlee's heart. He felt certain that she was at least beginning to conceive an attachment for this man, and he could not hide from himself the fact that a woman of her calibre was sure to experience a strong natural attraction towards such a character as his, independently of his exterior qualities, of the very sort to satisfy the demands of her exacting feminine fancy.

She had always professed abundance of worldly ambition, and a great contempt for ordinary girlish romanticism, but alas! who could rely upon professions of this sort from a young woman's lips? Let her heart but be touched, her judgment would speedily pro-

nounce according to its promptings. Christine's father had never been much impressed by her bravado of cool and calculating prosaicism, in which her mother and brother put considerably more faith.

While Mr. Brownlee was dressing for dinner—he was scrupulously attentive to all such minor gentlemanly duties—he meditated over the action circumstances now demanded of him. Clearly some action must be promptly taken, or Christine would let herself drift into a love affair without being aware of what she was doing; then, once fairly in love, and supported by so sturdy a wooer as Dr. Erskine was like to prove, she would be hopelessly unmanageable in paternal hands. As for her mother's influence, it was not worth counting upon: and, indeed, a little cajolery on the maiden's part would not fail to turn it into the wrong channel.

Perhaps there was yet time to effect a brilliant *coup d'état* which would save the rash girl and extinguish the doctor's hopes.

Before Mr. Brownlee descended to the dining-room to meet the family at dinner he had resolved on one decided step—he would give Will Urquhart a private advice to make an open and urgent demand for Christine's hand, promising him his hearty support in the matter. It was, of course, far from pleasant to see himself thus driven to making such a desperate effort to hook the desirable son-in-law he had been so long quietly and craftily angling for, but on account of the young man's tantalising scrupulousness and his own daughter's tacit refusal to bring on an offer from that quarter, the poor gentleman felt bound to interfere. As chance would have it, a most unlooked-for event gave him a speedy opportunity of putting his project into execution—Will Urquhart himself appeared upon the scene.

The soup was still on the table. Conversation, usually vivacious enough, thanks to lively Christine, was in an unmistakably unpromising condition, its wonted leader choos-

ing to maintain an air of offended dignity, when there came a blessed diversion.

Wheels were heard on the gravelled sweep in front of the house, towards which the dining-room windows looked. Hugh, starting up to reconnoitre, announced that the Boghall drag was standing at the hall-door, and almost at the same instant Mr. Urquhart appeared in their midst, apologising for disturbing them when at dinner.

'I was passing the gate, and the fancy took me to drive up and shake hands with you all round,' he explained, suiting the action to the word, while a chorus of questions saluted his ears.

'Where had he been?—Where was he going?—Wouldn't he stay to dinner?—Why not stay all night?'—this query being put by his uncle-in-law with a very hearty grip of his hand. So ran the string of demands.

He had been through to Edinburgh to make some book purchases, he was now on his way from the railway station, and was

bound straight for Boghall. The servants expected him to dine there, and so he'd better go; and then he gave a rather hesitating glance at Christine, by whose chair he was standing—pretty, pale Christine, with her interesting broken arm—for whose welfare he had scarce had time to ask—her frank, kind smile, and friendly, sympathetic looks.

‘Why, you’re quite damp, Will,’ that young lady said, naïvely laying an examining hand on the sleeve of his overcoat; ‘this will never do,’ and she turned as if for advice to the rest of the company. She seldom could resist her cousin’s pleading look.

‘Now, Will, you’ve been caught in the rain we had a little ago—a terrific downpour—don’t stand here another instant, working for an illness,’ she went on to say, seeing that the pressing invitations of the others did not suffice for him, ‘you know where to find a dry coat; get it on and come to your dinner as quick as possible, like a sensible man.’

‘Do, there’s a good fellow!’ chimed in

Hugh, 'send off the drag, and tell your man to come back to-morrow for you ; or I'll lend you my horse if you like.'

His uncle and aunt joined their voices to the young people's, and, nothing loth, the chance visitor yielded to become their guest for the night. Indeed much the same little scene was enacted pretty often. He had a special chamber sacredly kept for his accommodation, and had got into the way of leaving a suit of evening dress at Woodend. Imperceptibly he had come to belong to the Brownlee family, as it were.

In the course of a very few minutes he was comfortably installed in the seat of honour at his aunt's side, his soup-plate before him, and, thanks to the little excitement of this unforeseen dropping-in, the interrupted dinner went on much more cheerfully than it had begun. Mr. Brownlee was good-humoured and amiable to everybody around him, his own plaintive helpmeet included; Mrs. Brownlee was ready to forget herself in

affectionate solicitude for the comfort of her nephew of whom, partly on his own account, and partly because of his being the only surviving Urquhart of Boghall, she was really fond; Hugh and Christine amused him with their wonted bantering talk; the solitary young fellow, used to silent meals in his own big, lonesome mansion-house, his only company the staring portraits of dead ancestors and his own often melancholy thoughts, felt his heart warmed into tranquil happiness by the influences of the hour, and did not fail to add his little quota to the general fund of sociable cheerfulness.

‘I am only happy when I am here among you all, Christine,’ he told the girl during the course of the evening when they happened to find themselves alone together in a corner of the drawing-room. Her father was in the library which adjoined this apartment, Hugh was marching about in front of the house enjoying a cigar and the freshness of the damp, dark night, a thunder-storm having

cleared the atmosphere—her mother slumbered peacefully in an easy chair at the fireside, her back to the couple; ensconced in a window recess at the upper end of the room, they could safely rely upon their conversation being a private one, but Christine for her part drew no comfort out of that conviction. Unwilling to hurt her companion's feelings, however, she made no attempt to change her position, and contented herself with assuming a fearless, cousinly air.

'Then come oftener here among us all, Will,' she said with a bright nod. 'You know how glad we all are to see you whenever you take it into your head to come.'

Then Will looked wistful and sighed.

'I am always afraid of bothering *you*, Christine.'

'Nonsense, Will, why I am as glad to see you as anybody else can be; don't begin to fancy that you bother *me*. I'd as soon expect to hear Hugh talk in that strain—he is infinitely more bothersome than you, but

catch him ever acknowledging it,' she ran on volubly, doing her best to appear quite at her ease.

'Ah,' said her companion, with a shrug and an impatient movement in his chair, 'you are always like that, Christine. Why do you pretend to misunderstand me? You know very well that Hugh and I cannot have the same sort of ——' He hesitated over the word that rose to his lips, and Christine adroitly substituted another for it.

'The same sort of liking for me. No, of course not quite; but yet, considering how nearly we are related and how we've known each other since we were children, I think you might feel very sure that I would always be pleased to see you walk in upon us.' So she proceeded, deeply anxious to prevent him saying out more fully what he evidently had on his mind.

Was she shy of facing a question which she had not yet decided how to answer? Was she honestly unwilling to look upon

him in any other light than merely as a friend? Could it possibly be that deep down in that proud maiden heart of hers she was hiding a tender love for him, which, once allowed to assert itself, would speedily clear away as insignificant obstructions the prudence-prompted arguments against their marriage, a marriage which would for him mean the entering into a heaven of happiness?

A more sincerely puzzled young man it would have been hard to find in Christendom; and in fact Christine, if called upon for an instant explanation of her own feelings, would have found it impossible to define them.

All she felt sure of was an overpowering desire to stave off for at least a little longer the necessity of honestly examining her own heart, and deciding upon some definite course of action. Another idea also occupied her mind. It was hard, decidedly hard that she, still weak and unnerved after her

accident, should be annoyed with any such tormenting demands upon her, and on this last point she gave her companion a hint of rebuke, which he accepted with becoming submission.

‘I don’t want to annoy you, God knows, Christine,’ he told her with his most earnest look, as the library door was heard to open, and her father came in.

Her glance assured him that she had no real fear of his ever becoming a cause of serious harassment, and otherwise it enlightened him not a whit.

Perhaps after all it was well that on the morrow Mr. Brownlee’s firm hand interposed to settle on a solid foundation the future relationship between the pair of cousins—there had certainly been more than enough vacillating on the part of fair Christine.

CHAPTER XI.

'QUEEN CHRISTINE' IN TROUBLE.

CHRISTINE had refused him! He must go the rest of his life-road in dreary loneliness, uncheered by her sweet companionship, her tender sympathy. All the fond projects for making his dull, detested dwelling a fair and cheerful home, his colourless existence a full and satisfying life, had been in one moment dashed to the ground by that fondly-coveted little hand he would hold in a lover's grasp nevermore.

A shadow of great blackness seized on Will Urquhart's soul, a torturing sense of injustice wrung his heart. Why was he marked out for isolation and suffering, while all around him he saw human creatures rejoicing in tender relationships, in exuberant

health and animal spirits? What had he done that he was thus doomed? When would the sickening mystery be cleared away, the sore heart-hunger stilled? Never upon earth, moaned his sick soul; and for a moment he had ceased to believe in heaven.

To finish with it all as swiftly as might be, none knowing how cruelly he suffered, to close his tired eyes in the long, untroubled death slumber, to be laid away in the darkness and oblivion, while the busy, roaring world went round in its wonted course unheeding—such was the yearning that awoke within him.

Ah, there are many pitiful, unperceived tragedies enacted within human hearts, while outwardly there is no sign of disturbance in the prosaic, conventional surroundings of their lives!

The sun was setting gloriously, there was a multitudinous chirp and twitter among the leaves rustling in a fresh west wind, Hugh's voice and his own servant's were

heard discussing with animation the points of a horse he had bought a day or two before, his aunt from within the house was calling Christine at the pitch of her thin and querulous tones, while, his smart drag, drawn up in readiness for departure in front of the hall door, he stood mechanically patting the harnessed chestnut's sleek sides, and in spirit treading this desolate track of thought I have tried to describe.

Then Mrs. Brownlee appeared at the top of the flight of entrance steps.

'I can't find Christine anywhere,' she said; 'it is very strange of her not to come out to see Will off.'

'Don't trouble her,' said her nephew, scarcely glancing up, and Hugh, who was close beside him, remarked that he spoke huskily and looked very pale and *distract*.

At the moment it did not occur to him that there could have been any serious cause for this. He had taken offence at something Christine had said or done, he thought.

Christine was the proper person to set all right, and before Mr. Urquhart had time to stop him he had dashed into the house and was calling her in peremptory, impatient tones.

‘Have you been quarrelling with her, Will?’ Mrs. Brownlee asked her nephew, in a grieved voice, and with a soft touch of her hand on his arm; then he turned round and lifted his eyes to hers in a glance that told the whole story. He had no voice at his command just then, moved as he was by the question,

‘Oh dear!’ sighed the distressed mother, paling, and beginning to tremble nervously; but her son’s voice, sounding from an upper window, broke in on her commencing lamentation.

‘Will,’ it said, very gravely, ‘will you come up and say good-by to Christine?—she begs it of you.’

And, in a dull, mechanical way, scarcely conscious that his aunt kept by his side,

murmuring kind expressions of sympathy with him and petulant blame of her daughter, he moved into the house and up the staircase.

Hugh met them at the top of the first landing, and drawing his mother gently away, silently motioned to Will Urquhart to enter the girl's little morning room, a gesture which he as dumbly obeyed.

His head felt confused, a dull pain numbed his faculties, and he seemed as if walking in a dream.

Then Christine's hand slipped into his, and her face was close to him, a very pale, grieved face, down which big tears were coursing piteously.

'Don't be angry with me, dear Will,' she was saying, 'I could not help it. *Can* one help such things?' and the keen ring of pain in her voice woke him up, it was so foreign to Christine's voice until this day, when already, as she had answered his pleadings by a refusal, he had detected its presence.

'I am not angry,' he said, without looking

at her, he feared he would utterly break down if he *did* look, 'it is not that, God knows, my darling.'

His hand gripped hers in a convulsive grasp of unutterable emotion, then he loosed it suddenly, and dropping into a chair, overcome by a complete physical prostration, he leaned his head on his hands and sobbed aloud, his face hidden from her.

'I had only you, Christine; I was always thinking of you, planning things to please you at Boghall, hoping against hope that I would live and be happy with you; now it is all ended, the rest will be nothing but weariness, and death comes so slowly in illnesses like mine.'

Christine's tears kept falling fast. She knelt down by his chair, and drawing his hand within hers, stroked it softly, saying over and over again, in broken whispers, assurances of her affection, her respect, her bitter regret that she should have disappointed him so.

‘Long ago you knew very well that I loved you—not in a cousinly way only—why did you not stop my folly in time, Christine?’ he asked, rather bitterly, when keenly ashamed of his weakness he had regained a measure of composure, and was on his feet to go.

‘You were ill,’ she faltered, ‘how could I?’

She was giving him one of her reasons, but certainly not the chief one. Until the last few months her heart had been quite free, her ambition had been her chief motive power, and it had seemed to her quite possible to give herself in marriage to this good and estimable cousin, of whom she was really fond.

Of late her whole inner being had been undergoing a revolution, though very seldom did a sign of this change appear in her outward demeanour, so careful was the watch she kept over herself.

‘Say good-by then ; the sooner I go the better for me. Don’t blame yourself, Chris-

tine. I see clearly, now, that I should never have dreamed of asking you to be my wife. The sacrifice was too great to demand. I ought to have known that in spite of what ———,

There he broke off abruptly, finding himself on the point of betraying her father's interference, but Christine guessed what had occurred, and was bitterly mortified and ashamed.

‘Good-by, Will, and let us be friends still. You don't know how grieved I am,’ and another shower of hot tears fell fast.

‘Good-by, Christine, I'll come back by-and-by, when the first sting is over.’

Their hands met in a grasp that said more than they could find words to utter, agitated by different emotions as they both were, then Christine kissed him, mutely, weepingly, for the first time since they had been little children together, and giving her a last look, which she could not fail to remember all her life long, he went away.

A couple of minutes later she heard the wheels of the drag rolling off down the avenue and knew that he had fairly gone, and she was free to indulge the emotion which threatened to overmaster her.

‘Straight home!’ Mr. Urquhart said to his servant, as he climbed up beside him; and the man, who had been long in his service, perceived by the sound of his voice, and the lines of pain in his face, that something serious had happened.

He had been round at the stable when Captain Brownlee called his master into the house, and he knew nothing of what had happened since, but the grave faces which had watched the departure, the scarcity of the wonted good-by speeches, most of all the absence of fair Miss Brownlee, who had never failed before to appear on the threshold and wave a friendly adieu or bestow a parting bright nod and glance, told a plain enough story. As, stolid-looking and apparently unobservant, he took up the reins and drove

off, his eyes kept steadily fixed on the horse, he was mentally reviewing the state of affairs and pitying the wealthy yet unhappy young gentleman who sat beside him gloomily wrapt in his own thoughts. They had left the town behind them, and were swiftly bowling along the highway leading eastward, which skirted the Midforrest park and woods, when a stoppage became necessary. Part of the road was under repair, and owing to this a block had occurred.

Several carts heavily laden with stones, a couple of farmer's gigs, and a gentleman on horseback, were standing in front of them, waiting their turn to advance, while half-a-dozen Irish navvies, their picks laid aside for the moment, were chaffing the carters, who responded in less good-humoured and oath-embellished language. In the middle of the confusion, while the foremost horse was staggering painfully under a cruel overload and the infuriated blows of its driver, making frantic endeavours to clear the way,

the solitary rider sprang from his horse, throwing the bridle to one of the Irishmen, whom with a nod he had summoned to his side, then, pushing to the front, caught hold of the amazed and wrathful carter's arm as the heavy whip was once more about to descend on the poor trembling animal.

'For shame, man,' he cried out, a trembling of restrained passion in his deep voice, 'the poor beast is ready to drop; there are men enough here to lend a hand and get the cart out of the line,' and as he spoke he flung off his own coat and glanced to right and left of him appealingly.

'Hooray for the doctor!' roared a voice in the background; half-a-dozen helpers sprang forward in a moment, laughing and swearing in a breath. A few vigorous shoves from behind, some spirited pulls by the strong hands that had grasped the shafts, and, the needed aid thus supplied, the horse gathered up its remaining strength and pressed on with a will, its master, rather shamefacedly,

marching on by its side, and the vehicles behind following close in its wake.

As the energetic gentleman put on his coat again and, wiping a flushed and perspiring face, mounted his horse, his eyes chanced to meet Mr. Urquhart's, which had been watching him moodily, yet with admiration.

Dr. Erskine, for he it was, bowed lower than he was in the habit of doing. By one of his swift intuitions he perceived that the young squire was unhappy, he looked ill, too, and a step nearer his grave than when he had last chanced to meet him ; his manly heart smote him for having ever thought otherwise than kindly of Christine's cousin. Perhaps, too, he felt a comforting conviction that the girl was not likely to make any such *mariage de convenance* as, in an earlier stage of their acquaintanceship, he had believed her capable of doing.

Mr. Urquhart returned his salutation gravely, then the drag flew by, and Dr. Erskine rode on a little in its rear, the road

having now resumed its usual appearance, and the disturbance died away.

It was but a simple incident, but it served Will Urquhart as a subject for thought all the way home. In his heart he believed that this Gordon Erskine was the rival for whose sake chiefly Christine had refused to listen to his suit. And then he recognised in him a *fit* wooer, strong, physically and mentally, capable of lending vigorous aid when occasion required, a masterful man, yet bent only on worthy ends. To his ears, as to Christine's, had come several stories which had put it beyond doubt that the young doctor was worthy of all respect; none the less bitter in that first hour of inner anguish was the belief that he had gained the heart of the woman whom he had vainly loved all these years.

The twilight had fallen when the drag turned in at the lodge-gates. The wife of one of his gardeners, who kept the lodge, stood on the steps of her rose-embowered porch, a crowing baby in her arms. Mr.

Urquhart neglected to notice them as she made her little curtsey and came forward to shut the gates ; and missing his wonted nod or word of kindly greeting, she too felt aware of trouble in the atmosphere, and pitied her poor young master.

As he mounted his own flight of steps at the hall-door of the great lonely mansion-house, the twilight shades falling drearily around, he walked feebly, as one whose vital forces are at a low ebb. The servants who had been watching for his return after his night's sojourn at Woodend exchanged looks and head-shakes of ominous gravity ; and when, having sent away his dinner almost untasted, he was heard locking himself into the library, a thing he had never been known to do before, there was but one opinion among the household, that Miss Brownlee had refused to become the mistress of Boghall, and that no other mistress would it ever see while it continued in its present owner's hands.

Mr. Brownlee, who had been at his office as usual, came home in a tremor of inward agitation which made him hardly conscious of his outward surroundings. His nephew had promised to speak out in his absence, and he doubted not that by the time he reached home this marriage, which lay so near his heart, would have been arranged, or put aside for ever ; his daughter was not a girl to be dictated to in such a matter.

His wife's red eyes and headachy condition, along with the fact of his coveted prospective son-in-law having departed ere his return, proclaimed what had happened, even before she, according to Christine's wish, informed him of it in so many words.

He said very little, but his suppressed anger frightened the poor lady more than any outburst would have done ; and it was with no easy mind she heard him enter the morning-room, where Christine and her brother sat together.

' I want to speak to you *alone*, Christine,'

he said, in a low and wrathful voice, as he went in and drew a chair close to hers; and Hugh felt bound to obey his sister's glance and leave the couple together.

'Why have you refused to marry Will Urquhart? I mean to be at the bottom of it, Christine,' he began, fixing a frowning gaze upon her, as, pale and grave, but outwardly calm, she sat up in her easy chair and confronted him with a waiting air.

'Because I do not love him—not as I must love the man I marry—if I ever marry,' was her low-spoken reply, uttered with her eyes on the carpet.

'Good God!' cried her father; 'are you mad? Do you mean to say that after all I have done to fit Hugh and you for a higher position, toiling and moiling all the years you two have been enjoying yourselves in idleness and luxury, you are going to turn round on me now with such utterly ridiculous reasons for not doing as I ask of you? It's your turn to-day, and I should not wonder

all along been my aim to have you do,' interjected her father in a mollified tone, and with a sigh which touched her heart, perfectly capable of sympathising with his ambition.

'Well, dear papa,' went on the girl, laying a caressing hand on his knee, and bringing her pretty pale face, with its pathetic tired look, very close to his; 'surely you are not going to be seriously angry with me because I cannot marry Will. I have known him all my life; we have grown up together, as it were; and now, when he is so delicate in health—actually in danger—to become his wife merely for the sake of policy—out of cold-blooded calculation—oh, it would be so mean and base on my part, I *could* not do it;' and her eyes filled with hot tears, as from her father's look she saw that he was still resentful of her refusal to do this thing.

'Have you quarrelled with Will?' he asked, after a pause; and as she assured him

of the contrary, his face cleared a little. The young man had seemed infatuated about her; she was his cousin; and it might be, after all, that, seeing it was most improbable he would marry anybody else, his money and property would not be lost to the family.

Mr. Brownlee began to breathe more freely. There was still a leading part for Christine to play, and his knowledge of her character made him aware that she must be led into assuming it unconsciously, or she would at once rebel. Well, it was easy enough to let her alone and affect indifference.

“Well,” he remarked after another meditative silence, during which Christine had wiped away her tears and regained composure, “there is no use crying over spilt milk. You’ve thrown away a chance of establishing yourself, the like of which you may never have again as long as you live. You are old enough to know what you

are about, and I'll say nothing more on the subject. If you have common sense you'll undo to-morrow what you've done to-day.'

'*Never, never!* I do not change like that, papa—you might know me better,' Christine exclaimed, with a heartfelt resolution which convinced him that further advice was worse than useless.

Then, determined that she should be brought to yield some concession, however far from that implicit obedience he might have exacted from a daughter of a more flexible nature, he demanded of her a promise which her code of filial duty forbade her to refuse.

'Give me your word that you have not bound yourself to marry anybody else, Christine;' and a keen look of scrutiny was bent upon the fair young face, making it flush hotly.

'I have certainly done nothing of the sort,' she said in a low voice.

'And will not do anything of the sort without my consent? That is all the promise I ask of you, Christine.'

She hesitated, and began to tremble nervously, and Mr. Brownlee felt more than ever bent on making her yield so far. Christine had a conscience and a stern sense of honour in keeping clear of falsehood; he could safely rely on her word, once earnestly given.

Of course Gordon Erskine was in his mind as a possible cause of coming trouble; but for him he would have trusted to his daughter's own sense of what was due to her father.

She too knew perfectly well what was his reason for making this demand; and though she told herself that the young doctor was no declared lover of hers, and might never be so, she yet shrank from the idea of putting this possible obstruction between them.

There followed a trying scene betwixt

father and daughter, the result of which was that the required promise was given, and peace was restored for the time being.

‘You don’t suppose *I* want to work your unhappiness, good God! Christine,’ her father exclaimed in all sincerity, as, pleased by her submission, he drew her to him and kissed her, sincerely grieved to see how worn out and unlike herself she looked that afternoon.

Remembering the boundless indulgence he had hitherto shown her, seeing the fatherly tenderness in his air at that moment, Christine took heart of grace again, and mustered up a little smile of trustfulness, which was accepted as the signal for a return to ordinary life.

‘I must go and get ready for dinner, papa,’ she said, getting out of her chair, and impatiently brushing away a last trickling tear from her cheek; and, to the pleased amazement of her brother Hugh, at dinner,

she appeared half an hour after with an air of tolerable serenity, and on terms of quiet amity with the irate old gentleman in whose hands he had left her with many misgivings so shortly before.

‘How on earth did you manage him, Queen Christine? Upon my word you are the cleverest girl I ever encountered,’ was the speech which saluted her ears at the very first moment Hugh found a private opportunity of questioning her.

‘He managed *me*,’ owned Queen Christine, with a shrug and a sigh, ‘or rather I had to succumb to the promptings of filial duty;’ and then she told her trusted confidant the whole story, asking him whether he thought she had yielded too much.

‘Certainly not,’ pronounced the soldier with decision. ‘He’s a very good father to you and me, Chrissy, and of course we’re bound **not** to fly in his face in making our matrimonial arrangements. Marrying any-

body he likes to haul forward as a suitable *parti* is a different matter, and you and I shall support each other in making a stand at that point, should need arise.'

'What are you talking about, children?' put in their mother's voice from a distant sofa—the three were together in the drawing-room—'I do hope you are not going to oppose your father's wishes any further. I am sure he indulges you in every conceivable way, and really if there is to be much more warfare of the kind we've had to-day I'll be worried into my grave,' and the poor lady heaved a sigh of pathetic length, and cast a beseeching look in the young couple's direction.

'Peace has been proclaimed, mother, keep your mind easy,' Hugh told her good-humouredly, rising to give her a re-assuring kiss.

'I have been vanquished, and papa is in possession of the field. What more would

you have ?' chimed in Christine, following his example.

And so was settled the first serious quarrel that had ever threatened to sow discord among the members of the Woodend household.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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